the weekly Standard

OCTOBER 11, 2010 • $4.95

OBAMA'S WAR ON THE YOUNG
YUVAL LEVIN

GONE TO POT

The Medical Marijuana Charade

BY MATT LABASH

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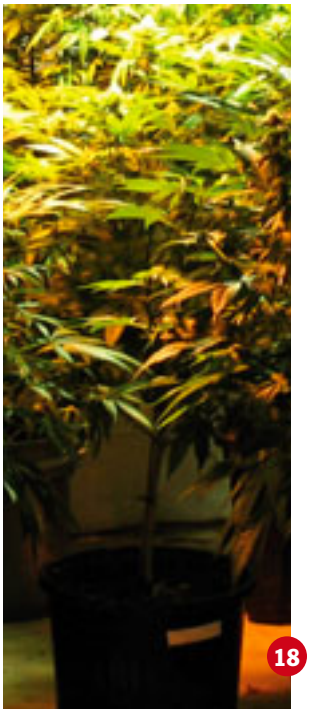

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JFK-a-Palooza

Herewith a friendly warning from The Scrapbook: We're just a few weeks away from the golden anniversary of John F. Kennedy's election as president, and already the commemorative essays and video tributes are raising the nation's blood sugar to diabetic levels.

One example is *USA Today*'s September 27 edition, which not only features a wistful, front-page photograph of JFK from his Senate days and weepy analysis—"50 years after win, a legacy endures: JFK's short tenure is still shaping USA"—but, literally, a special nine-page section devoted to the two-and-a-half-year Kennedy presidency. The Scrapbook has read it so that you don't have to, but we think that just repeating a few of the headlines—"Caroline carries on her parents' legacies," "America's quintessential icon of style and grace," "Obama: Life was 'source of inspiration'"—is sufficient to convey the overall tone to interested readers.

Which leads us to a corollary that The Scrapbook firmly believes: Journalism may be the "first rough draft of history," as journalists like to say; but once journalists get something wrong, they cling to their mistake with all the tenacity of Rosie O'Donnell clutching a Big Mac.

The Kennedy presidency (1961-63) is a wearisome case in point. The president's tragic murder, for example, took place in Dallas, Texas, where, as we are persistently reminded, right-wing politics and polemics were dominant, and the John Birch Society was especially active. But you can read innumerable accounts of the Kennedy assassination without ever learning that his actual assassin was a standard left-wing crank of the day—active with the Fair Play for Cuba Committee, a defector to the Soviet Union! It isn't all that difficult to picture him today, a splenetic 71, tuning in to, say, Keith Olbermann on MSNBC for his nightly fix.

Read *USA Today* and you will learn that, in 1960, the American people fell in love with the handsome young war hero/senator from Massachusetts, unanimously elected him president over the five-o'clock-shadowed Richard Nixon, and that before Dallas, JFK enthralled the world with his dynamic leadership, transformed American life with one legislative triumph after another, and inspired a generation of young people to "ask not what your country can do for you," etc.

The fateful debate, September 1960

In truth, of course, on the heels of recession, Kennedy barely squeaked by the incumbent vice president Nixon, and it was Kennedy's successor, Lyndon Johnson, who actually got the Kennedy-Johnson legislative agenda enacted in the form of the Great Society—a mixed achievement at best. Indeed, even if you accept *USA Today*'s assertion that Kennedy's "short tenure is still shaping USA," it is worth speculating about the shape of the USA and a wider world if Kennedy had, in fact, been defeated in 1960, and Richard Nixon and Henry Cabot Lodge had led the country for the next eight years.

If, for example, the Bay of Pigs invasion had been supported by American airpower (as Nixon would undoubtedly have ensured), Fidel Castro might well have been overthrown some 49 years ago, to the incalculable benefit of the Cuban people. If Nixon had met with Nikita Khrushchev in Vienna in June 1961, as JFK did, he is not likely to have impressed the Soviet leader with his weakness and inexperience, as JFK did—which would probably have prevented the construction of the Berlin Wall (August 1961) and the installation of offensive nuclear missiles in Cuba, which would have meant no Cuban Missile Crisis (1962). It is unlikely that Nixon, Dwight Eisenhower's faithful deputy for eight years, would have presided over a slow, clandestine, uncertain buildup of U.S. troops fighting a "limited" counterinsurgency in South Vietnam.

There would have been no legislation authorizing the organization of public employees into labor unions, no attempt to regulate steel prices, no wiretapping of Martin Luther King, no Mafia molls slipping in and out of the White House, no Camelot or Jackie O or Rep. Patrick J. Kennedy. You could still fly from Heathrow to Idlewild, and Mary Jo Kopechne would be 70 years old. And since Nixon would probably have served two terms throughout the 1960s, there would have been no Watergate, no War Powers Act, no Harry Blackmun, no Jimmy Carter.

And not least, no nine-page special section of *USA Today* celebrating Richard Nixon's 1960 election. ♦

What's Wrong with this 'Correction'?

The *New York Times* ran a curious "correction" on September 23, which reads as follows: "An article on Wednesday about the quarrels among President Obama's national security advisers described in a new book by Bob Woodward referred incompletely to Vice President Joseph R. Biden Jr.'s reported assessment of Richard C. Holbrooke, the president's special representative for Afghanistan and Pakistan. While Mr.

AP

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Biden is indeed quoted as calling Mr. Holbrooke 'the most egotistical bastard I've ever met,' he also is quoted saying that Mr. Holbrooke 'may be the right guy for the job.'"

The curious part is that, if you read closely, you'll notice that nothing is being corrected. The quotation was accurate but unflattering to the famously thin-skinned, not to say egotistical, Holbrooke, who had sufficient clout with the *Times* that he got them to revise and extend their remarks to make them marginally less unflattering.

An enterprising blogger who goes by the nom de plume NYTPicker and who, as his name suggests, makes it his business to read the *Times* with a magnifying glass, noticed that this is not the first time Holbrooke has leaned on the *Times* for a faux-correction. There have been many through the years. Our favorite, from August 27, 1999:

> An article yesterday about Richard C. Holbrooke's first appearance at the United Nations since his Senate confirmation as chief United States representative misstated the history of the appointment. While his confirmation was delayed for nearly a year, most of the delay was due to a Justice Department investigation, not to Congressional roadblocks. The article also misstated the duration and nature of the Senate hearings. They did not last months and were not grueling. ♦

RAHM EMANUEL GETS A DEAD FISH AT WHITE HOUSE SEND OFF.

No Questions Asked?

One of the more puzzling episodes in the history of federal meddlesomeness occurred two weeks ago when the Drug Enforcement Administration announced a nationwide prescription drug "take-back" at some 4,000 locations around the country. Bring in your unused prescription drugs, it was announced, and they would be collected and destroyed. Moreover, the DEA emphasized: "No questions asked."

Now, The Scrapbook understands that prescription drugs—like any controlled substance—can be abused, and that unauthorized drug combinations and overdoses cause a certain number of accidental (or deliberate) fatalities each year. But why would the DEA think it's necessary for conscientious people to transport their unused prescription medications to federally authorized centers for official collection and destruction? We agree it's not a good idea to flush pills down the toilet, or toss them to the wind where some small animal might ingest them; but if you wish to be rid of them, what's so difficult about depositing pills and capsules in your handy trash can?

For that matter, why should people be assured that "no questions" will be asked? The Scrapbook can't think of any legitimate government inquiry under the circumstances. We would understand such an attitude, of course, if this were a case of turning in illegal firearms, or a tax amnesty, or some comparable gesture of federal noblesse oblige. But there is no statute preventing people from retaining drugs for which they have a prescription; and a federal "take-back" program, aside from a waste of taxpayers' money, seems to imply a certain illegality where there is none.

The Scrapbook does not take the problem of drug abuse lightly, but it might be necessary to remind the

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DEA that most Americans are not addicts, consume prescription medications responsibly, and don't deserve to be treated by their government with suspicion. ♦

Year Two, Better than Ever

The fifth issue of *National Affairs*, successor to the legendary quarterly *The Public Interest*, has just appeared. The magazine, edited by Yuval Levin, goes from strength to strength.

Interested in public sector unions (as you should be)? Daniel DiSalvo, who wrote about them in these pages with Fred Siegel ("The New Tammany Hall," October 12, 2009), has a terrific primer about the problem, its severity, and the range of possible solutions. Interested in our national debt? Jason Thomas tells you what you need to know. School choice? Frederick Hess is your man.

It's a first-rate collection of pieces that should cement *National Affairs*' reputation as a quarterly must read for anyone interested in American public policy. To subscribe, go to nationalaffairs.com. ♦

More Progress for the Rake

A tip of The Scrapbook homburg to our colleague Matt Labash. His profile of former Washington, D.C., mayor Marion Barry, "A Rake's Progress," which first appeared in these pages last September, has been selected to appear in the volume *Best American Essays 2010* (Mariner Books).

Barry later lavished praise on Labash's reportorial technique: "He was nosy as hell"—quite a compliment from a man who was investigated by the FBI, the IRS, and federal prosecutors (among others) during his storied political career. ♦

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Surf Local!

It's about time for a new surfboard. My old one is fine, but like most great pastimes surfing marries physical enjoyment with the collector's impulse. Good surfboards are objets d'art and a pleasure to own.

Shopping for a surfboard, however, isn't as much fun as it used to be.

As a machine, the surfboard has changed very little in the 200 years since European explorers first saw Hawaiians riding waves. Its dimensions have remained fairly constant since antiquity: between about 6′ and 11′ long and about 28″ wide.

The material used to make boards, on the other hand, has changed. In ancient times, boards were carved from wood. In the 1930s surfers discovered that they could use light-weight balsa, and later dense polymer foam, coated in fiberglass. Today epoxy resin is sometimes used as a sealant.

That aside, today's surfboards are remarkably similar to those from the distant past. If you went back in time and handed a modern board to a surfer from the court of King Kamehameha, he would have known exactly what to do with it.

Likewise, the economics of the surfboard remained constant for a very long time. Until the early 1990s, surfboards were made by A Guy at the Beach. In any locale where surfers congregated, a few would become interested in building boards. These "shapers" were artisans, usually looking to sell just enough boards to support their own surf habit.

It doesn't diminish the shaper's art to note that making surfboards has always has been a low-intensity industry with a low skill barrier and almost no start-up costs. You can teach yourself to shape a surfboard in your garage for $200. And while you might not be as good as a professional shaper, his economics and manufacturing process will differ very little from yours.

Because of that, the industry has some peculiarities. In most cases, if you seek out a shaper and tell him exactly what you want, he'll make a custom board for less than you would pay in the store because (1) he was going to make a board anyway, but for an uncertain prospective client, and (2) you are cutting out the middleman. (Once you ride a custom board, made by a shaper who's fitting it not just to your body but also to the waves at your beach, you'll never go back to *prêt-à-surfer*.)

MICHAEL SLOAN

Another oddity is that surfboards are a hyper-local good. Because they're so big, shipping can easily add more than 30 percent to the cost. As a result, most boards are sold near where they're made. The shaper literally drives his wares to the local surf shop, where they're sold on consignment. As a result, surfboards are one of the few products that have been relatively immune to the influence of the Internet.

They have not, however, been immune to globalization. In the '60s, when Gidget, the Beach Boys, and the surf craze hit America, a few companies took to mass-producing surfboards. These factory-made creations were known as "pop-out" boards. Pop-outs remained a marginal part of the industry until early this decade, when companies realized they could radically cut production costs by making pop-outs overseas.

Foreign pop-out boards are easy to spot in surf shops because they're roughly half the price of boards made by local shapers. They're also junk.

Today, however, some companies have begun making hand-shaped boards in Asia. A "master shaper"—that is, an American surfer who knows what he's doing—supervises a shop full of workers who have, in all likelihood, never surfed a day in their lives and are being paid in rice and beads.

The production costs are so low that these boards can be shipped to shops all over America and still sell for a fraction of the price of boards made by local shapers.

These foreign boards have been quite successful: Today they account for nearly 40 percent of the 600,000 surfboards sold annually in America. And sooner or later, they're going to drive the Guys at the Beach out of business.

There's no crying in capitalism, of course; two cheers for the free market and all that. But my selfish concern is that if the two or three Guys at My Particular Beach close up shop, then the product I want—a board custom-made for me and the waves on my little stretch of North Carolina coast—won't be more expensive. It won't be available at all. Not that there's anything to be done. The dialectical materialism of the Walmart school spares no one, not even surfers.

The lesson, I suppose, is that I ought to order my new board now, before it's too late. Actually, I should probably get two. Just to be safe.

Jonathan V. Last

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The Chief Water Bug Departs

On October 1, Rahm Emanuel announced his departure as White House chief of staff, ending the shortest and most hapless tenure in that position since Bill Clinton replaced his childhood friend, Mack McLarty, in 1994. McLarty is a nice guy who wasn't tough enough to bring order to Clinton's White House. Emanuel is a tough guy who wasn't mature enough to bring good judgment to Obama's.

According to Bob Woodward, National Security Adviser Jim Jones called Emanuel and his fellow political aides "the water bugs." "They flit around," Jones said. "Rahm gets an idea at 10 A.M. and wants a briefing by 4 P.M., and I will say no," because the work can't be done that quickly. According to Woodward, Jones believed "the water bugs did not understand war or foreign relations . . . and were too interested in measuring the short-term political impact of the president's decisions in these areas."

But Emanuel turned out not to be particularly good at measuring the political impact of the president's decisions. Or was his sage political counsel too often rejected by the president—as he has suggested on not-so-deep background to friendly journalists?

What would Niccolò do?

Either way, Emanuel was supposed to be the experienced chief of staff to an inexperienced president, the Machiavellian operative aiding an idealistic leader, the wizened strategist protecting Obama from the usual mistakes of a new and callow chief executive. Among those mistakes: yielding too much authority to congressional leaders of your own party, who will tend to be partisan and interest-group-driven; surrounding the president with White House staff who quickly become smug, insular, and arrogant; and encouraging the president in his fantasy that he was elected because of his remarkable ability to sway the public, not because the party in the White House was unpopular and exhausted.

Emanuel failed to protect Obama from these temptations. He failed to check Pelosi and Reid. He failed to bring into the White House men and women of substance who could keep the president in touch with public opinion and objective realities. And how many times did Emanuel remind Obama that he, Obama, was no political genius, that he'd won the nomination despite losing most of the big primaries to Hillary Clinton, that he'd run behind congressional Democrats nationally, that his "mandate" had to be carefully nursed and broadened?

The answer is obvious. Emanuel reinforced rather than tempered Obama's oversized self-confidence and self-referential arrogance. This is clear from the only memorable comment from Emanuel's tenure, the one he made right after being selected: "You never want a serious crisis to go to waste." This may well go down in history as the most foolish and damaging pseudo-clever statement ever made by a chief of staff.

The prior recipient of this distinction was the late Donald Regan, President Reagan's chief of staff from 1985 to 1987, who famously described his job as leading the shovel brigade that cleaned up after the circus elephants. The lead circus elephant about whom Regan was complaining was presumably President Reagan. For this foolish expression of disdain for his boss, among other reasons, Regan was fired.

But Emanuel's foolish disdain was less for his boss than for his countrymen. Along with his fellow liberal best and brightest, Emanuel regarded the public as children who, rattled by the financial crisis, could be steamrolled into welcoming a big government agenda. This conceit was fatal to Obama, for it led an entire administration and an entire political party to believe that the smart set could easily re-shape American reality and spin the American people.

So Emanuel's fatal conceit was crippling—to Obama. And if President Bush made a mistake by surrounding himself with too many annoying and self-important "Mayberry Machiavellis," as former Bush adviser John J. DiIulio put it, President Obama made a worse mistake by selecting as his chief of staff a bantam cock pseudo-Machiavelli.

And it is Obama who's paid the price. As the real Machiavelli remarks at the beginning of Chapter 22 of *The Prince*,

> The choice of ministers is of no small importance to a prince; they are good or not according to the prudence of the prince. And the first conjecture that is to be made of the brain of a

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> lord is to see the men he has around him; and when they are capable and faithful, he can always be reputed wise because he has known how to recognize them as capable and to maintain them as faithful. But if they are otherwise, one can always pass unfavorable judgment on him, because the first error he makes, he makes in this choice.

Obama made an error in choosing Emanuel. He now has a chance to do better, and begin to reorient his administration. But first, the new chief of staff has a lot of cleaning up to do, as Rahm Emanuel takes his circus parade to Chicago.

—William Kristol

The Obamacare Follies

The Patient Protection and Affordable Care Act of 2010, aka Obamacare, turned six months old on September 23. Hardly anybody celebrated the occasion, and it isn't hard to figure out why. Last spring President Obama promised Democrats that supporting the new entitlement would turn out to be a political winner. But, like a lot of Obama promises, this one's turned out to be a bunch of baloney.

Obamacare is less popular than it was on the day it was born, and it wasn't popular then, either. Practically the only Democrats who mention the law in campaign ads are those who brag about voting against it. Large numbers of Americans, including a majority of independents, would like to see the law repealed. No wonder the pro-repeal GOP maintains an edge in the congressional generic ballot. As much as the public continues to distrust Republicans, it understands that the first step in undoing this harmful law is giving John Boehner the speaker's gavel.

The case against Obamacare is simple. The requirement to buy health insurance is constitutionally dubious. The law lards taxes, rules, and fees onto an already overregulated health insurance market. Its accounting is filled with gimmicks and tricks and relies on rosy assumptions about how many people will sign up for the government-subsidized insurance "exchange." Those subsidies may be much more expensive than anticipated, because companies probably will find it cheaper to pay a fine than pay for their employees' health care.

Furthermore, since the fees for violating the individual mandate are also low, Obamacare may actually lead to an increase in the uninsured, as individuals wait until they are sick to buy a health plan. In the meantime, since the bill increases demand for insurance while constraining supply, premiums will rise. And when the government attempts to control the price of premiums (as with any other good), shortages will result.

Add it all up, and you have a law that will make health care more expensive and less satisfactory. It's also a law that exposes a massive gulf between the American people and the Democrats who govern them. When Americans responded to Barack Obama's call for change in 2008, they wanted a change from a lousy economy and two long and unpopular wars. Obama and his lieutenants wanted something else. They wanted a change from the last 30 years of American government. They wanted redistribution in the service of income equality.

As the president famously told Joe the Plumber, "When you spread the wealth around, it's good for everybody." It therefore never really mattered that most voters placed a much higher priority on jobs, the economy, and the deficit than health care. For Obama and his liberal base, a universal entitlement to health care was always the top priority. Obamacare, more than anything else, is the change they were waiting for—whether the rest of us like it or not.

In a way, the tenacity with which Obama clings to his health care overhaul is almost admirable. After all, he's sacrificed a lot for his ideology. His job approval rating dove underwater in the summer of 2009, when Congress took up health care legislation in earnest, and it hasn't yet come up for air. He forfeited his claims to populism when he signed Obamacare into law despite public opposition, the rise of the Tea Party, town hall protests, and the election of Scott Brown to the Senate.

Obama's credibility was severely damaged as he toured the country and promised audiences that he could give millions of people health insurance, not change a thing for people who already have insurance and like it (i.e., most people), and cut the deficit at the same time. Just the other day in Iowa, during yet another tedious "backyard discussion," Obama felt compelled to condescendingly remind a concerned voter that "there's nothing in the bill that says you have to change the health insurance you've got right now." Who's he kidding? Voters understand that any piece of legislation has unintended consequences. And one consequence of Obamacare will be to force changes in people's health insurance, even if they are happy with what they have now.

This is a president who loves teachable moments, and there's no better one than Obamacare's six month anniversary. Pay attention, class: The central piece of Barack Obama's presidency is a law that was passed by a narrow partisan margin over a public outcry—a law that increases dependency on government and will do untold damage to American health care. Repeal of that law will presumably require a Republican president in addition to a Republican Congress, so the homework assignment for 2013 is tough but worthwhile. Repeat after us: Don't let Obamacare reach its third birthday.

—Matthew Continetti

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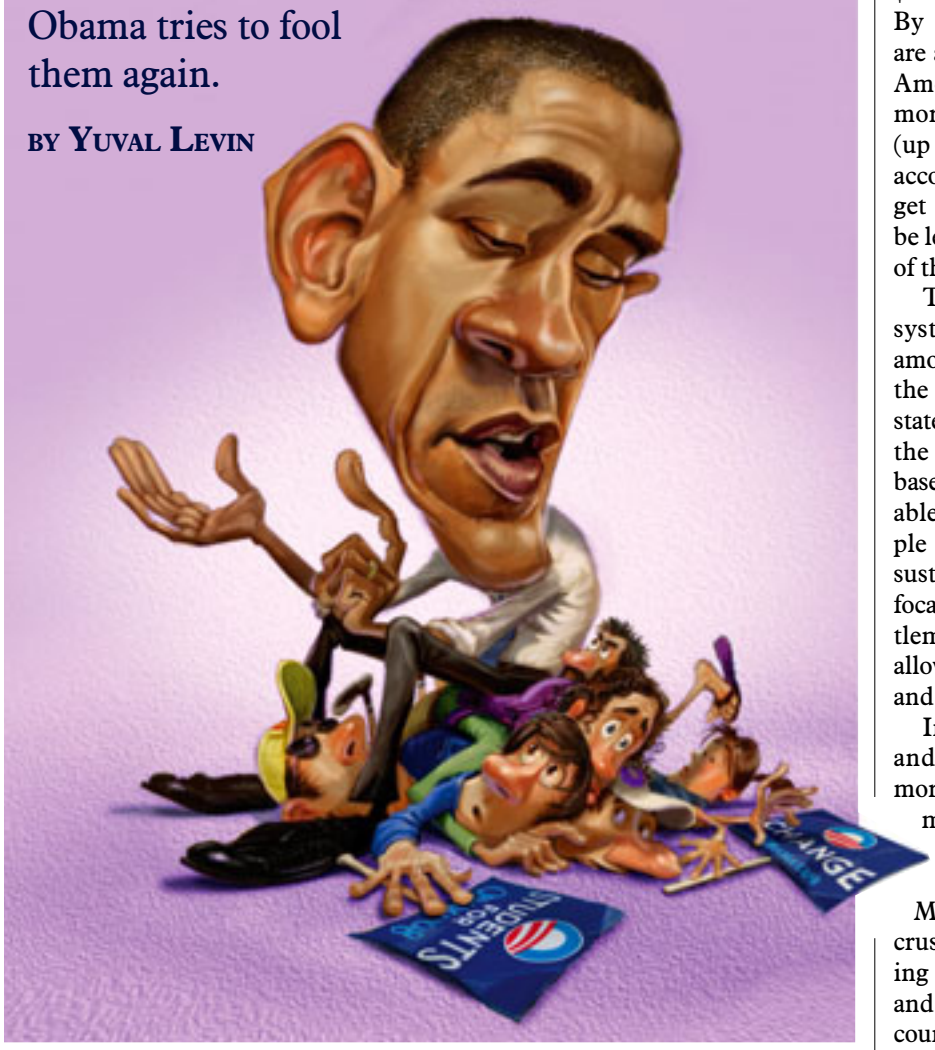
The War on the Young

Obama tries to fool them again.

BY YUVAL LEVIN



GARY LOCKE

Last week, in an effort to limit the damage to congressional Democrats in November's elections, President Obama set out in pursuit of the youth vote, traveling to several college campuses to rally the young activists who were so important to his presidential campaign. "What I want to do is just to speak to young people directly and remind them of what I said during the campaign," he told reporters on Monday.

But rather than listen to the president talk about what he said two years ago, young voters should look at what he has been doing ever since. In fact, it is precisely younger Americans who should be most distressed by Obama's agenda and governing choices as president: Their future is at stake, and they are on the losing end of his key policies.

To begin with, the debt we are amassing will have to be shouldered by the young throughout their working lives. President Obama has added nearly $3 trillion to that debt in his first two years in office (after his predecessor had added more than $4 trillion in his eight years). And Obama's budget would add a total of more than $11 trillion over just the next decade. By the time today's young workers are at the peak of their working lives, America's national debt will equal more than 200 percent of our GDP (up from roughly 60 percent today), according to the Congressional Budget Office. Today's young voters will be left with the bill, but without many of the benefits of that spending.

That is because our entitlement system, which transfers immense amounts of money from the young to the old, cannot be sustained. Welfare states are always built on the backs of the young, and some degree of age-based wealth transfer is reasonable, as able-bodied workers help older people who can no longer work. But to sustain themselves, and to avoid suffocating the larger society, such entitlement programs must take care to allow young workers to build wealth, and to start families of their own.

In America—as our society ages, and as health care costs grow far more quickly than the economy—our major entitlement programs are clearly failing that test, and the burden of Social Security and Medicare spending will increasingly crush the dreams of the young, leaving them with less disposable income and a less prosperous and competitive country. Both the Social Security and Medicare trust funds are projected to be depleted long before today's young workers retire, and the resulting drain on general government revenue will squeeze out other programs and require colossal tax increases.

Rather than address these problems, President Obama and the Congress have chosen to pile an enormous new entitlement program atop them. The health care bill enacted in March is a massive transfer of wealth from people at the beginning of their working lives to (generally much wealthier) people toward the end of their working lives.

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Beyond the sheer cost of its new system of subsidies, the law strictly limits the difference between insurance premiums paid by 18-year-olds and those paid by 64-year-olds—despite enormous differences in health care costs between the young and the old. It therefore makes health insurance far more expensive for younger people while compelling them to buy it. It is also slated to increase overall national health care spending, which will of course be borne by today's young taxpayers in the coming decades.

The flimsy assertion that the health care law will reduce the deficit, moreover, is based on the Congressional Budget Office's calculation that over the next ten years, if the law is carried out precisely as written, its gargantuan net tax increase of $525 billion will exceed its gargantuan net spending increase of $410 billion. But higher taxes and more spending are not the way out of our fiscal dilemma. And in any case, as the CBO itself acknowledges, the spending figure relies on some unrealistic projections and promises. In reality, spending under the law is likely to be even greater than the tax burden, and the deficit and debt are likely to rise further still as a result.

All of this amounts to an assault on the economic prospects of young Americans. That assault was not launched by President Obama alone, to be sure. It is the result of a failure of two generations of American policymakers (and citizens) on the right and left alike to avert the looming collapse of our entitlement system. But President Obama and the Democrats seek to turn that failure into a governing philosophy—willfully ignoring the entitlement crisis, compounding its causes, and maligning those (like Representative Paul Ryan) who take it seriously.

The fact is that the implicit ideal of the left—the European-style social-democratic welfare state—is hostile to the young and to future generations. It prioritizes present benefits over future growth, present retirees over productive workers, and the present generation over those to come. No society can remain wealthy and strong with such distorted priorities. It is up to the young in particular to resist further steps in this direction, and to press the nation's leaders to change course and reform our entitlement system.

To do so would not be selfish of today's young voters. On the contrary, to keep America strong, members of this generation will need to be exceedingly unselfish—paying taxes now to support the retirement of their parents and grandparents, but trimming and means-testing their own future benefits so their children and grandchildren can thrive.

One way or another, today's younger voters will be the ones to shoulder the costs of reforming the American welfare state, and the longer we wait the more burdensome and difficult that reform will need to be.

One way or another, today's younger voters will be the ones to shoulder the costs of reforming the American welfare state, and the longer we wait the more burdensome and difficult that reform will need to be. Therefore, the best thing today's policymakers can do for young voters is to get on with that work.

Among other steps, such reforms will need to include raising the retirement age, tying benefits to prices rather than wages, some means-testing of Social Security and Medicare (carefully designed to avoid creating disincentives to save) so that benefits go to those who need them, and turning Medicare in particular into a defined-contribution program so that it stops inflating health care costs uncontrollably. This should be combined with greater tax incentives for private retirement savings. No one over 55 should be affected by these changes, and for those below that age reforms should be phased in gradually to allow people to plan.

But if such gradual reforms are to be possible, they must begin soon. That means taking the blindfolds off of our eyes and acknowledging the plain reality that the century-old liberal dream of a social-democratic welfare state—the dream at the heart of the Obama administration's agenda—is neither attainable nor desirable.

Instead, we should pursue a free economy with a robust safety net—a society that values young workers and parents no less than retirees, and that helps the poor become more independent rather than making the middle class less so.

Everyone should want that, and especially the young. ♦

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Comedy Central

The House of Representatives.

BY PHILIP TERZIAN

On the Thursday after Memorial Day, 1933, J. Pierpont Morgan Jr. sat at the witness table awaiting the resumption of a hearing by the Senate Banking Committee investigating the practices of New York investment banks. Suddenly, a publicist with the Ringling Brothers circus thrust a German-born dwarf named Lya Graf onto Morgan's lap: "The smallest lady in the world wants to meet the richest man in the world!" announced the publicist. The room erupted in laughter, photographers crowded in to take pictures, and a smiling Morgan exchanged pleasantries with Miss Graf, complimenting her on her hat.

This was not the first, nor would it be the last, time the dignity of Congress—pardon the expression—had been assaulted for theatrical purposes. In 1966 the antiwar activist Jerry Rubin appeared before the House Un-American Activities Committee dressed in the uniform of a Revolutionary War soldier; the following year he showed up in the costume of an urban guerrilla, complete with toy rifle.

In more recent years members of Congress have enlisted film and television actors to lend their celebrity to favored causes—Jane Fonda testified on the rural economy in the 1980s, Meryl Streep on the food additive Alar in the 1990s—and in 2002 "Elmo" from *Sesame Street* (actor Kevin Clash) addressed a House education appropriations subcommittee on funding for school music programs.

So it may be said that the notion of celebrities petitioning the government at the invitation of Congress is now an established practice, and that "Elmo" did not speak as a citizen but in the guise of a character on a popular television program. None of this, however, quite equates with the appearance on September 24 of comedian Stephen Colbert before a subcommittee of the House Judiciary Committee at the invitation of its chairman, California Democrat Zoe Lofgren. In the words of left-wing blowhard George Stephanopoulos of ABC News, Colbert plays a "conservative blowhard" on his Comedy Central program, *The Colbert Report*, and his testimony was presented "in character." Sitting near the president of the United Farm Workers union, Colbert addressed the subcommittee on the subject of migrant farm workers, ostensibly in support of a UFW organizing campaign. He had spent a recent day pretending to do agricultural work, and the stunt was the ostensible subject of his testimony.

Congressional hearing, 1933

GETTY IMAGES

Members of Congress are not famous for the sophistication of their humor, and it is debatable how many Americans, the vast majority of whom do not watch *The Colbert Report*, comprehend that Stephen Colbert's act is "ironic" in intent, and that his "conservative blowhard" persona deliberately adopts and extols ludicrous positions and pronouncements for a political purpose. There was a smattering of nervous laughter in the audience as Colbert spoke, and the committee (including its Democratic members) sat stoically throughout his performance. Indeed, sensing the gathering catastrophe, Democratic representative John Conyers had invited Colbert to submit his testimony in written form and leave the hearing room. But Colbert, who reminded members that he had been invited by Chairman Lofgren, was determined to perform: "This is America," he said. "I don't want a tomato picked by a Mexican. I want it picked by an American—then sliced by a Guatemalan and served by a Venezuelan in a spa where a Chilean gives me a Brazilian."

The ranking Republican member, Representative Steve King of Iowa, declared that footage of Colbert purportedly packing corn showed him performing the task backwards, which King suggested might have been caused by malfunctioning video. Colbert took mock umbrage at the notion that he had not, in fact, packed corn on camera: "I was a corn-packer," he insisted. "I know that term is offensive to some people because 'corn-packer' is a derogatory term for a gay Iowan." There was a quiet murmur from the audience.

This might well have been the first joke about anal intercourse ever delivered in testimony before a congressional committee, but the historic moment did not alleviate the nervous discomfort felt by most in the room at the spectacle of a branch of government being used as a vehicle for a TV comedian to perform a monologue lampooning subjects—migrant labor, immigration from Mexico—that involve a degree of human misery, suffering, and death. When the hearing concluded, Stephanopoulos's ABC colleague Jake Tapper extolled Colbert's performance for having publicized rural working conditions, and Speaker Nancy Pelosi defended his appearance (and her California colleague Lofgren) with some decidedly equivocal words:

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"He's an American, right? He came before the committee. He has a point of view. He can bring attention to an important issue like immigration. I think it's great."

Of course, no one had disputed Colbert's right as an American to petition Congress; the question was whether this particular episode reduced public esteem for Congress to unprecedented depths or, a little over a month before the midterm elections, revealed the desperation and disharmony—and attendant lack of judgment—within Democratic ranks.

In due course, it fell to Speaker Pelosi's deputy, Majority Leader Steny Hoyer, to acknowledge what had been obvious the week before: The spectacle may have been more embarrassing to Colbert than to the House, he told Fox News, but "I think it was inappropriate."

Lya Graf, whose given name was Lia Schwarz and whose mother was Jewish, returned home to Germany in 1935, was arrested in 1937, and was incinerated at Auschwitz in 1941. ♦

Don't Show All Your Cards

The Chris Christie strategy for GOP candidates.

BY FRED BARNES

If all goes well for Republicans in the midterm elections, they'll capture the House and maybe the Senate, having revealed few specifics of what they might do in the next Congress. This makes sense. It's the Chris Christie strategy.

Christie was elected governor of New Jersey last year after giving voters no more than a glimpse of his plans for the state. The reason was simple. Had he laid out his sweeping agenda of spending and tax cuts, he'd have given Democrats an inviting target. They surely would have tried to scare voters away from Christie, and it might have worked. Instead he concentrated on Democratic governor Jon Corzine as the main issue—and won.

For Republicans this year, the Christie strategy calls for making President Obama, Democrats, and their policies (jobs, spending, deficit, debt, Obamacare) the issue, while going light on the particulars of their own hopes and plans. An example is the Pledge to America issued by House Republicans. It's more vague than specific, and properly so. It fits the strategy.

But there's a rub. While the strategy is clear, there are doubts about whether Republicans, once elected, will act. Will they push vigorously for cutting spending, trimming the size of government, impeding steps to implement Obamacare, blocking any tax hikes, and generally thwarting Obama and Democrats? Will they be bold?

I'm inclined to think they will, at least in the House. Not bold like Christie in New Jersey, where the governor's office is the strongest in the nation. But bold in ways that at least go beyond opposition to Obamacare and set the stage for Republicans to gain full control of the White House and Congress in the 2012 election.

One of the biggest spurs to moving aggressively in 2011 is likely to be the newly elected class of Republican House members. There may be 60 or 70 or more of them, most elected in seats previously held by Democrats. They will make up a quarter, maybe 30 percent, of the Republican conference. They won't be patient backbenchers. They will want to take momentous action.

The Republican freshmen (and women) are overwhelmingly admirers of Paul Ryan of Wisconsin, the author of "A Road Map for America's Future," the far-reaching blueprint for smaller government and freer, less regulated markets. Most are wary of endorsing every item in Ryan's plan. But they share his vision of an America that turns sharply away from the statist Obama model of big government and puts the country on a sound fiscal footing.

"They're coming out of the woodwork," Ryan says. He has campaigned for many of them. "Limited government and free enterprise people are coming [to Congress]," Ryan says. "It's fantastic."

Ryan himself will be enormously influential if Republicans take the House. As chairman of the budget committee, he'll oversee the writing of the House version of the federal budget. It's bound to reflect some of the ideas in the Road Map, reduced spending in particular, but not the reform of Social Security that Democrats allege is on the Republican agenda for 2011. It also has to be a consensus budget, approved by the vast majority of House Republicans and thus not radical.

Another force for boldness is John Boehner, the likely speaker in a Republican House. True, this is not Boehner's reputation. But he suffered through two painful episodes of Republican control of the House—the Newt Gingrich era in the mid-1990s and the Tom DeLay era that ended abruptly when Republicans lost the House in 2006. Boehner doesn't want to preside over another Republican resurgence that fizzles. "He understands what's at stake in America right now," a House Republican says.

Boehner has vowed to do "everything" to stop Obamacare from being implemented. On that subject, he's been quite public. "When I say we're going to do everything to make sure this law does not go into effect, I mean everything," he told the American Enterprise Institute last week. "Is that clear?" It includes blocking funds for

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"up to 22,000" federal workers assigned to lay the groundwork for the health care program, Boehner said.

He is also ready to unleash Ryan and the Republican most likely to become the scourge of the Obama White House, Darrell Issa of California. "[Boehner's] never done one thing to hold me back," says Ryan. On the contrary, Boehner has spoken favorably about the Road Map.

Issa will be chairman of the House Oversight and Government Reform Committee if Republicans take control. Even as the ranking Republican on the committee, Issa sought to investigate the White House's offer to Joe Sestak to drop out of the Senate primary in Pennsylvania. (Sestak refused, and defeated Senator Arlen Specter.)

As chairman, Issa has promised to double the size of the committee staff and investigate the Obama administration and especially the White House. Boehner declared last week that Issa has his full backing to use subpoenas as part of his investigations. "Congress has an appropriate role under the Constitution to provide oversight of the executive branch, and I would pledge that it's going to happen," Boehner said.

He was putting it mildly. Issa is a tough-minded critic of the Obama administration. With subpoena power, he'll be able to gather information that may be embarrassing to the administration, or worse.

The Christie strategy has a twist to it. Republicans don't want to trot out everything they'd like to do next year—specific cuts in programs, for instance—because that might fuel Democratic attacks. But they don't want to overpromise either. With Obama in the White House, their power will be limited by divided government. "Why would we want to overpromise when we know we can't deliver things?" Ryan says.

Divided government is a legitimate excuse for not accomplishing much. The public, however, expects the election of Republicans to make a difference. So, difficult or not, Republicans had better produce more than they've talked about so far. Just like Chris Christie. ♦

The Second Carter Term

Obama's strategic vision is straight out of 1977.

BY MICHAEL S. DORAN

President Obama came to power intending to rectify the perceived mistakes of George W. Bush in the Middle East. With that goal in mind, he announced two major initiatives: reaching out to Iran and intensifying efforts to achieve an Israeli-Palestinian peace treaty. Neither effort has borne fruit, as two speeches at the recent meeting of the United Nations General Assembly have reminded us. President Mahmoud Ahmadinejad used his address to shun yet again the outstretched American hand. This time, he suggested that the United States had orchestrated the 9/11 attacks in a futile attempt to maintain its faltering grip on the Middle East. Iran is on the rise, he said: The United States is a spent force. For his part, President Obama urged the Israelis and Palestinians to sign a peace agreement within one year. Less than a week after this exercise in direct presidential encouragement, the talks between the two sides have faltered and may well be suspended. In the light of these setbacks, it is a good time to reconsider some of the fundamental assumptions of what might be called Obama's "strategic belief system."

Bush's Global War on Terror, Obama reasoned, was a classic example of overreach. Bush had defined the strategic threat as the convergence of state sponsors of terrorism, terrorist groups, and weapons of mass destruction. That definition placed the United States in conflict with al Qaeda, certainly, but also with Iran, among others. From Obama's perspective, lumping all terror sponsors together was a crude strategy: It forced a number of potentially helpful states, including Iran, solidly into the enemy camp. The Iranian regime might be unsavory, Obama reasoned, but it shares with the United States a deep hostility to al Qaeda and a desire for stability in Iraq. A less Manichean approach, therefore, would allow Washington to exploit the overlap in interests. Consequently, Obama defined the strategic threat much more narrowly: He declared war only on al Qaeda and related movements. Iran, though certainly not a friend, is no longer clearly defined as an adversary.

This narrow definition, however, is proving inadequate, and Obama will likely be forced to widen it soon. To understand why this is so, it is helpful to compare Obama's experience with that of Jimmy Carter.

Like Obama, Carter took office believing that his predecessors had exaggerated the strategic threat of the day, and had prosecuted a senseless, self-destructive war. The threat, of course, was the Soviet Union; the war, Vietnam. In seeking a hard-power solution to the spread of Communism, the United States had grown estranged from its better angels and, in doing so, undermined American security. The international system, Carter assumed, was relatively benign—provided, that is, that the United States would stick to the high road and refrain from stirring up opposition to itself. In his first major foreign policy speech, Carter famously claimed that fears of Communism were "inordinate."

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A series of provocations from Moscow, however, made it very difficult for the president to defend his policy of outreach. In December 1979, the tipping point came with the Soviet invasion of Afghanistan. Carter's newly awakened perception of danger was magnified by the fact that the Red Army had rolled across the Afghan border less than a year after the Iranian revolution. The confluence of these two events stoked fears in Washington that Moscow might seek to exploit American vulnerabilities in the Persian Gulf.

The Soviet invasion prompted the president to issue a bold statement of American primacy: The Carter Doctrine. "An attempt by an outside force to gain control of the Persian Gulf region," he announced, "will be regarded as an assault on the vital interests of the United States of America, and such an assault will be repelled by any means necessary, including military force." Carter, like Obama, had come to Washington with the intention of cooperating with an erstwhile adversary and abjuring a reliance on hard power. He left proclaiming American hegemony, and developing the military tool—the Rapid Deployment Joint Task Force, which was CENTCOM's precursor—needed to protect it.

Try as he might, Obama will find this legacy impossible to escape—not because the Carter Doctrine itself is a straitjacket but, rather, because the Persian Gulf is still today a key strategic issue. Neutralizing Tehran should be the overarching strategic goal of the United States in the Middle East, but the Obama administration has been slow to define Iran as the central problem. A major cause for this reluctance is, ironically, another Carter legacy. In addition to reaching out to enemies, Obama is also following the Carter tradition of viewing Arab-Israeli peacemaking as a primary strategic task.

Carter's views were a reaction to the policies of Nixon and Kissinger, who regarded the Arab-Israeli conflict as a subset of the Cold War. In their view, Israeli power was an asset for establishing American primacy, providing Washington with an instrument for making Egypt choose: War and economic stagnation under the Soviet umbrella, or peace and Western economic investment under the aegis of American power. From this perspective, the U.S.-Israel alliance enhanced American power and prestige. Carter saw this approach as an extension of the zero-sum mentality in the Cold War that he sought to extirpate from American strategic thinking. In addition, it stirred up Arab enmity. Israeli power was, in Carter's view, as much a liability as an asset, because it transformed Arabs who otherwise had no quarrel with America into its antagonists. Promoting peace, in his mind, was therefore synonymous with restraining Israel.

Like Obama, Carter took office believing that his predecessors had exaggerated the strategic threat of the day, and had prosecuted a senseless, self-destructive war.

Obama sees himself as providing an identical corrective to the perceived excesses of his predecessor. Bush, he believes, moved too close to the Israelis. By supporting them unquestioningly, he alienated Muslims throughout the Middle East. An invigorated peace process, Obama believes, will reduce hostilities across the board and render the region more hospitable to the United States.

Whatever one thinks of this approach, it certainly made more strategic sense in Carter's day than it does now. Prior to the Camp David Accords, the primary regional ally of the Soviet Union had been revolutionary Egypt, so Cairo's decision to make peace with Israel represented a strategic windfall for the United States. The Soviet Union had lost its premier client in the Middle East, Washington gained a major ally, and the Eastern Mediterranean was significantly pacified. Today, however, the potential for a similar breakthrough is nonexistent. Obama's efforts are focused primarily on brokering an agreement between Prime Minister Netanyahu and President Abbas, whose Palestinian Authority, unlike pre-Camp David Egypt, already occupies a position within the American security system. The prospects for the success of these efforts are minuscule. But even if the talks were to produce an Israeli-Palestinian agreement, the basic strategic picture that we see today will remain unchanged because it will not significantly mitigate the Iranian threat.

Keep in mind that just as Egypt changed sides in the Cold War, within a year the United States lost a major ally with the fall of the shah. Iran eventually went on to take up the mantle of revolutionary Egypt as the leader of anti-American forces in the region. When Egypt and Iran traded places, the center of gravity in the region shifted from the Eastern Mediterranean to the Persian Gulf. The sticking point is that Arab-Israeli peacemaking is a tool for calming the former and has limited value, if any, with respect to the latter.

Carter's tangled legacy has ensnared Obama. The Carter Doctrine calls on Obama to safeguard American hegemony in the Gulf, but the success of the Camp David Accords creates the illusion that peacemaking is the means to do so.

Over time Obama may well recognize the illusion for what it is. Iran sees itself as a geostrategic rival of the United States, not as a potential partner. Just as the nature of the Soviet Union prevented Carter from working constructively with it, so the nature of the Islamic Republic will preclude Obama from constructive negotiations. At the same time, Obama will come to realize that the Israeli-Palestinian talks, even if they resume, will never pay great strategic benefits. Like Carter, he will be compelled to adopt a more comprehensive strategy to protect the American order in the Persian Gulf. Sooner or later, the enemies of the United States will force on the president a wider definition of the strategic threat. ♦

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Building America's Next Bailout

Here we go again.

BY CHRISTOPHER PAPAGIANIS

It has become obvious in the past year that states face huge budget holes. And the federal government has come to their rescue: The $814 billion stimulus measure included over $280 billion to help states patch their budgets, and just before Congress went on its summer break, it scattered around another $26 billion to help with state health and education deficits. Despite these efforts, the cumulative budget shortfall for states next year is still projected to top $140 billion. Long-term, states also face massive shortfalls in pension benefits for public employees. They have promised over $3 trillion in retirement benefits and, according to the Pew Center, are at least $1 trillion short. How did states get into this mess?

Some were hit particularly hard by the recession, which crimped tax collections. Others simply made bad budget decisions, or put off necessary spending cuts for too long. But the federal government bears at least some of the blame by making it too easy for states to borrow money.

The main (and traditional) federal subsidy is allowing investors in bonds issued by states and localities to exclude interest payments from their taxable income. A second subsidy, much less well known, was created as part of the 2009 stimulus package: Build America Bonds, or BABs. The BABs program was an effort to reinvigorate the municipal bond market by giving states and localities a financing tool for capital projects that would be attractive to a new set of lenders—those who didn't benefit from the traditional tax exemption.

Given the federal government's history of subsidizing state and local borrowing, what's wrong with a new financing tool? Put simply, it's the name of the program, which was crafted well before the recent economic crisis, and how the bonds are being marketed abroad. These may sound like trivial objections, but the naming and marketing of these debt obligations is misleading and may introduce even greater volatility into municipal finance and the broader financial system.

Unlike traditional munis, the interest earned on BABs is taxable. This means that the states must pay higher rates of interest on them to attract lenders. The federal government in turn provides a cash subsidy to the issuing state or locality that equals 35 percent of the bond's interest costs. From the state's point of view, the cost of borrowing stays the same. But the BABs are especially popular with tax-exempt entities (i.e., pension funds) and foreign institutions that are not subject to U.S. income tax. These buyers or investors are generally unwilling to purchase standard municipal bonds because they do not benefit from the tax exemption.

Interest payments on bonds are included in investors' ordinary income. Let's say an investor with a 35 percent marginal tax rate contemplates buying some kind of bond. A corporate bond may yield 7.5 percent. Because a traditional municipal bond is tax-exempt, this investor would receive the same income from a municipal bond that yields 4.875 percent. (You can see how much money a state or local government saves by being able to borrow at a much lower rate.) Once investors bid the municipal bond's yield down below 7.5 percent, however, it no longer makes sense for tax-exempt or foreign investors to buy the security. With a BAB on the other hand (to continue this same example), the investor would receive 7.5 percent while the state government, thanks to the federal subsidy, would still be borrowing, in effect, at 4.875 percent.

The BABs program has significantly increased foreign investment in the municipal debt market. ("Municipal debt," for the uninitiated, is a catch-all term for all government borrowing below the federal level—by states, cities, localities, and their agencies.) According to the Treasury Department, there have been 1,543 separate Build America Bonds issuances in 49 states, totaling more than $122 billion since the program's inception in April 2009. Many observers view this positively, as expanding access to credit means that states can borrow more now rather than enact painful budget cuts. But it's only good news if no one defaults. And as of this spring, state and local governments already had $2.4 trillion of debt outstanding. It is worth noting that Build America Bonds have become the fastest-growing part of the municipal bond market. In 2010, BABs are on a path to account for between 20 and 30 percent of the entire municipal debt market.

Net foreign purchases of municipal debt have increased nearly tenfold since the first BAB was issued. Federal Reserve data suggest that foreign buyers have acquired more than 40 percent of all BABs issued in 2010. Indeed, in a little more than a year, foreign investors have gone from financing virtually none of the municipal debt in this country to more than 70 percent of all new issues. By the end of the second quarter, the Fed estimates that foreigners held $83 billion of municipal debt, virtually all of it in BABs.

In July, Illinois went to market with a $900 million BAB issue that attracted 93 investors, including 17 from overseas. The international investors accounted for about 30 percent of the offering. Illinois state officials even

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joined their underwriters, Citigroup, on a road show through Europe and Asia to drum up interest in the sale.

Unfortunately, the rising popularity of BABs could make a federal bailout of the states more likely, because there is now a new class of investors (foreigners) who can reasonably claim to have been misled as to who is ultimately responsible for these debt securities. As with regular municipal debt, BABs are not backed by the federal government. Yet these bonds have the "Build America" brand—and not the moniker that would be more accurate: "Help deeply indebted states borrow more to build more stuff."

Not surprisingly, confusion about who stands behind these obligations has contributed to the program's popularity. The fact that cash-strapped California has issued 22 percent of all BABs since the program's inception is one of the more troubling signs supporting the hypothesis that foreign investors view these securities as enjoying an "implied" federal guarantee.

International investors—and U.S. taxpayers—are all too familiar with implicit guarantees. Fannie Mae and Freddie Mac, the U.S. government-sponsored enterprises (GSEs), grew into behemoths that profited from their special relationship with the government—then left taxpayers holding the bag when things went south. To date, U.S. taxpayers have had to pay $150 billion to bail out Fannie and Freddie.

Foreign investors were also huge buyers of the debt obligations of the GSEs—and they were a big part of the U.S. government's rationale for bailing out the GSEs. Before the implicit federal guarantee for the GSEs was made explicit—when the U.S. government literally took over Fannie and Freddie in 2008—China held more than $500 billion and Russia more than $100 billion of GSE debt obligations. In total, foreign investors owned more than $1.6 trillion.

All of this foreign investment in Fannie and Freddie helped channel global liquidity to support U.S. homeownership. Yet when it became clear that the enterprises' assets could no longer support their liabilities, these same foreign investors began selling their debt obligations on an unsustainably large scale until the federal government agreed to step in. In his recent book, former Treasury secretary Hank Paulson mentioned that he received intelligence suggesting the Russians and Chinese discussed coordinating their efforts to put pressure on the U.S. government to act.

Sadly, the situation with Build America Bonds reveals that the U.S. government hasn't learned its lesson. It looks like foreign investors are betting that if a state or locality starts to struggle with BABs payments, the federal government will step in with a bailout or guarantee—just as it was pressed into doing with Fannie and Freddie.

So here we go again. The first half of the story is the same as the GSE saga. Foreign investment in BABs is helping states avoid spending cuts in the near term and helping to advance new construction or building projects. But what's going to happen when it becomes clear to investors that certain states and localities no longer can support all their liabilities? If these foreign investors begin selling BABs on a large scale, will the federal government refuse to step forward with a guarantee? Right now, it looks increasingly likely that the federal government will step into the breach.

The Obama administration and Congress owe it to taxpayers to clarify—now, before it's too late—that "Build America" bonds are not backed by the federal government. If they don't make this explicit, the total foreign holdings of BABs might be large enough to force Washington's hand in the not-so-distant future. And while the BABs program is set to expire at the end of the year, there are several pieces of legislation pending before Congress that would extend it beyond this year.

As Congress considers these bills, now is the perfect time for the U.S. government to include legislative language clarifying who exactly stands behind Build America Bonds—namely, the state and local governments that issue them. If this situation isn't addressed and the program is extended for several years, foreign

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holdings of municipal debt could easily exceed $150 billion. This is not a small number, even for a market that's measured in the trillions. In fact, it's roughly equal to the total foreign holdings of Greek government debt, which was enough to spark a debt crisis in Europe earlier this year.

A key lesson from the financial crisis is that creditors based expectations on informal relationships between entities instead of strictly defined legal relationships. What began with banks having to rescue structured investment vehicles and other "sponsored" off-balance sheet entities (that were not technically guaranteed) only ended when governments stepped in with a broad banking industry bailout. The lesson to lawmakers should be clear: Seemingly innocuous promotional material or coordinated efforts to expand investor interest can be viewed as implicit backing for the creditworthiness of the underlying obligations.

Build America Bonds are also blunting the incentives for states to borrow less, which would be a logical response to their deteriorating credit profiles. Access to a new class of bond buyers, in short, has fueled more borrowing by state and local governments. It's a slow-burning fire (for now) that could get out of hand and require federal intervention.

Harrisburg, Penn., for example, announced on September 1 that it will skip a $3.29 million debt payment that is tied to a $288 million incinerator project that has roughly $68 million of debt outstanding. Days later, the governor and the state government had to step in to help the city out. Unfortunately, some big state governments around the country—California and Illinois in particular—are severely strained and it's possible that some other cities and municipalities won't be as fortunate as Harrisburg.

While the numbers from Harrisburg may not sound that large, this situation was on track to be the second-largest municipal default this year, and many market analysts worry that it could be one of the early signals of more defaults over the coming months.

Making marketing materials clear and perhaps capping—or even lowering—the federal subsidy would lead to less borrowing by less-creditworthy municipalities and more borrowing by more-creditworthy municipalities. In this way, the likelihood (and magnitude) of municipal bailouts would decrease. The federal government can protect taxpayers and avoid building America's next bailout. It just needs to prevent the BABs program from expanding until it's too big to fail. ♦

Trouble in Fishing Waters

China's military provocations.

BY GORDON G. CHANG

On September 7, a particularly aggressive Chinese fishing boat captain, Zhan Qixiong, rammed his vessel, the *Minjinyu 5179*, into two Japanese patrol boats after he refused to heed warnings to leave disputed waters in the East China Sea. The incident occurred around the islets and rock outcroppings Japan administers and calls the Senkaku Islands. Beijing and Taiwan know the specks as the Diaoyus and claim them as well.

Tokyo quickly released the crew and their boat but kept Captain Zhan in custody. His detention led to increasingly vituperative statements from Beijing—as well as a series of retaliatory acts, such as the cut off of exports of certain rare-earth minerals to Japan.

The episode has been portrayed as an accidental crisis, but it appears China engineered it. For one thing, Zhan may not be a fisherman but a captain in the Chinese Navy. Beijing appears, moreover, to have flooded the seas around the islands with its craft. In early September, for instance, there were about 160 Chinese fishing boats bobbing in the waters around the Senkakus, even though there is little legal basis to China's assertion of sovereignty over them.

The weakness of their claims have not prevented the Chinese from pursuing their expansive territorial ambitions. Although they settled land borders with various governments this decade, they have been adamant about claims, many of them essentially baseless, to nearby islands and seas.

For instance, Beijing maintains that its exclusive economic zone in the East China Sea reaches almost all the way to Japan. Tokyo more reasonably believes the zones meet in the middle of that body of water. Similarly, the Chinese central government issues maps showing virtually the entire South China Sea as an internal Chinese lake, with the result that it declares as its own the continental shelves of six other nations: Taiwan, the Philippines, Indonesia, Brunei, Malaysia, and Vietnam.

The South China Sea claims predate the founding of the People's Republic, but the Communist party, unlike the predecessor Kuomintang government, actively enforces them. Beijing from the mid-1970s through the middle of the last decade seized islands and reefs from the Philippines and Vietnam.

In the earlier part of this decade, Beijing was not so obviously aggressive. In 2002, for instance, it signed a code of conduct with ASEAN, the association of nations in Southeast Asia, and thereby agreed to settle competing claims peacefully. Many analysts then argued that the acceptance of the code showed that China was maturing as a

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power, and American experts marveled at Beijing's deftness. Marvin Ott of the National War College even called Chinese diplomacy "a thing of beauty."

Indeed, China's beautiful diplomacy was effective as it picked off its neighbors one-by-one. Yet the country's Communists ultimately could not help themselves and reverted to type, going back to rough tactics in the last few years. The Chinese, for instance, have begun to patrol disputed waters aggressively, often using their fishing vessels in a quasi-military role. This increased activity was followed by Beijing's renewed emphasis on its maritime boundaries. In March, the Chinese government added its South China Sea claims to its list of "core interests," a term previously reserved for Taiwan, Tibet, and Xinjiang.

Beijing's more aggressive pursuit of its offshore ambitions occurs at the same time it has stepped up its challenge to America's exercise of the right of free passage through international waters and airspace. Most notably, in March 2009, China's aircraft and boats intercepted two unarmed U.S. Navy reconnaissance vessels, the *Impeccable* in the South China Sea and the *Victorious* in the Yellow Sea. At the time, a Chinese trawler tried to steal a towed sonar array from the *Impeccable*, an attempt that constituted a direct attack on the United States. This year, moreover, the People's Liberation Army loudly challenged the presence of the U.S. Navy in the Yellow Sea, where U.S. and South Korean ships have been practicing defensive maneuvers in the wake of Pyongyang's torpedo sinking of the *Cheonan*, the South Korean frigate, resulting in the loss of 46 lives. In recent months China has been taking on America and almost every coastal nation in the region at once.

So why did Beijing make the strategic shift from subtle diplomacy to outright confrontation? "China wants to change the rules of the game," Yuan Peng, a high-level Chinese foreign policy specialist, noted recently. The Communist party had always hoped to do so, but beginning late last year it began to unveil what veteran China watcher Willy Lam calls its "new-look foreign policy."

And why last year? Perhaps because Beijing for the first time thought it had the ability to implement its game-changing ambitions. China's new policy approach came about the same time Jeffrey Bader of the National Security Council publicly suggested, in remarks delivered in November, that no important issue could be solved without the cooperation of the Chinese. Bader, in effect, gave Beijing a veto over American policy.

Presidents Hu Jintao and Obama in Beijing

Soon after Bader made his ill-advised comments, President Obama went to the Chinese capital for his disastrous summit, returning both humiliated and empty-handed. Since then, China has been especially uncooperative. In short, the ruthlessly pragmatic Chinese believed the Obama administration was weak and pressed what they perceived to be an advantage.

The president has evidently—and wrongly—believed that relations with China soured because Washington had not tried hard enough to build bridges to Beijing. So as the Chinese acted more belligerently, we became even more friendly. For instance, when the People's Liberation Army broke off military ties with the Pentagon in the first months of this year, the administration redoubled efforts to reestablish them.

Yet that effort looks futile because China's flag officers, who are evidently calling the tune in Beijing these days, obviously do not want better relations with the United States. During the 1990s, China's top brass lost influence in top Communist party organs. Yet they recouped much of their losses in the middle of this decade when they essentially acted as arbiters in a low-level political struggle between supremo Hu Jintao and his predecessor, Jiang Zemin, who was trying to linger in the limelight.

Top officers at this moment appear to be making further political gains as the party prepares for the next transition, when the so-called Fourth Generation leaders give way to the Fifth, scheduled to occur at the end of 2012. So as the civilians squabble, generals and admirals have been exploiting deep splits in the party's leadership to gain even more prominence in decision-making circles. Tellingly, senior officers now feel free to speak out on matters once considered the province of civilian officials. The remilitarization of Chinese policy is perhaps the most important factor fueling Beijing's recent aggressiveness in asserting territorial claims—as well as other matters.

Tokyo released Captain Zhan Qixiong on September 24, but that conciliatory gesture only spurred Beijing to issue more demands to the Japanese. As a result, China's government looks like it is entering a phase where it cannot be placated, appeased, or, to use the term of the moment, "engaged."

In July, Secretary of State Hillary Clinton executed a partial pivot by telling Beijing that the peaceful settlement of competing claims in the South China Sea was a U.S. "national interest." That was an important start, but Washington still thinks China's autocrats can be integrated into a liberal international order they had no hand in creating.

Recent events demonstrate that the Chinese will not become cooperative members of the global community anytime soon. Beijing's new militancy means that Washington has fundamentally misunderstood China—and that we now need to adjust our assumptions and our policies fast. ♦

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Gone to Pot

The medical marijuana charade

By Matt Labash

Southfield, Michigan

It's hard to recall the precise moment when I realized I'd been hoodwinked by my US Airways pilot. Instead of taking me to Detroit, as my ticket promised, it seemed he had deposited me on the set of *Weeds*, the Showtime program about a workaday upper-middle class mother who decides to become a pot dealer.

That moment might have come after leaving the airport in my rental car, when I saw a clinic sign beckoning motorists to get an exam for their state-certified medical marijuana card. Or it might have come when I saw the multiple billboards for hydroponic gardening equipment (no, they're not growing hothouse tomatoes here). Or maybe it was seeing the oversized highway sign heralding the season premiere of *Weeds* itself, the show that plunges you into California cannabis culture, from clandestine grow-rooms to "dispensaries"—the quasi-legal pot shops that one character on the show described as making Los Angeles like Amsterdam, except "you don't have to visit the Anne Frank house and pretend to be all sad and s—."

Then I opened Detroit's alternative weekly *Metro Times*, which instead of being chock-full of ads for used futons and anonymous sex, as is the custom with such papers, was lousy with medical marijuana ads: for marijuana gardening academies; for pot doctors from places with names like Green Medicine ("No medical records? No problem."); for the Medical Marijuana Extravaganja, a two-day jamboree of stand-up comics and horseshoe tournaments and centerfold contests which feature women like the one in the ad, who is holding a snake in one hand and an apple in the other, her ample gifts blossoming from a green bud bikini. You know, to pull in the chemo sufferers.

But the final dawning that I'd landed in the autumnal mists of a land called Honah Lee—as the poets Peter, Paul and Mary used to put it—probably came the day I went back to college. Not journalism school, mind you. What would be the point? Journalism—like making cars—is a dying industry around these parts. But there is a growth industry emerging in Michigan, the first one for decades: state-sanctioned pot dealing. And here in colorless, odorless Southfield, a white-bread suburb of Detroit, is one of the best places to learn how to do it, Med Grow Cannabis College.

Modeled partly on Oaksterdam University in Oakland, which became a weed-education hub after California legalized the medical use of marijuana in 1996, Med Grow is the brainchild of 24-year-old Nick Tennant. As Tennant's auto-detailing business tanked in the Great Recession, Michigan followed California's lead and became one of 14 states to legalize medical marijuana, with 63 percent of the vote in 2008. Technically, it's still against federal law. Marijuana—even when it's called medical—remains classified by the Feds as a forbidden Schedule 1 substance, meaning surly DEA agents can make trouble for its users. But the Obama Justice Department issued a 2009 memo directing U.S. attorneys not to target those "in clear and unambiguous compliance with existing state laws" that permit the use of medical marijuana.

The state of Michigan now approves medical marijuana, but doesn't provide it. So somebody needs to grow all this medicinal herb. The act allows a certified patient to grow up to 12 plants for himself, or to choose a certified caregiver who can grow for up to five patients (for a total of 60 plants, or 72, if the caregiver is also his own patient, as is often the case). And that's why Med Grow is here—to teach people the ins and outs of the weed business, from growing it, to writing it off on their taxes. As they say in their mission statement—and you know weed has become serious business when a pot school has a mission statement—Med Grow is "dedicated to your success in the Medical Marijuana Industry, and your reputation is reliant upon it."

GETTING RID OF THE STIGMA

Med Grow's campus is nothing more than a faceless address in an office park. It sits discreetly off 10 Mile Road, in a place where most business names camouflage what they do anyway, all packaged amidst crisp topiary in a building with tinted windows and space-age silver curvilinear trim, the way some architect thought the future would look before it became the present. Inside, however, it's clear Med Grow is enjoying boom times. The lobby is adorned with framed stories

Matt Labash, a senior writer at The Weekly Standard, *is the author of a collection of essays,* Fly Fishing with Darth Vader *(Simon and Schuster).*

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from all those who've already visited the school, though it's been open less than a year: *Crain's Detroit Business*, *Rolling Stone*, the *Washington Post*, *Time*, the *New York Times*. Competing for wall space are the exotically illustrated labels of Wet Betty and Bud Candy and VooDoo Juice nutrients and root boosters.

Arielle, the cute receptionist/office manager who takes people's $595 for our condensed five-day course (the school also offers six-week, weekend, and even online plans), will freely tell you that she'll soon grow plants for herself as a patient, which is necessary because, "My sheet says [I have] severe and chronic migraines, along with severe nausea and vomiting, and then, um, menstrual cramps. . . . My mom's getting into it, too!" Mother and daughter hope to make edibles (pot brownies, cannabutter, the works).

In an adjoining room, the 45 or so students line up to buy their textbook: Jorge Cervantes's *Marijuana Horticulture: The Indoor/Outdoor Medical Grower's Bible*, which covers all things weed-related, from aeroponics to zinc deficiency. Medical pot, however, is not for sale, and nobody's allowed to smoke in the open. There is, however, a sealed-off "medicine room" in the back, where students who already have their cards can medicate themselves during breaks. One can smell a musky vegetative fragrance emanating from behind the whiteboards in the one classroom that serves the school. Open the walls up, and there are also three mylar-lined grow-rooms, with carbon-scrubbers, inline fans, metal halide and sodium lights, all of which help grow the medicine, which bears names like White Cheddar and McFrosty.

The 'medicine': one of the grow rooms at Med Grow

PHOTOS: MATT LABASH, THE WEEKLY STANDARD

As I enter the classroom, I look for a place to plug in my laptop. The nearest outlet is in a locked room, which the school's sales manager, who wears colorful Bonnaroo T-shirts and calls himself Cliff (nearly everyone I talk to uses fake names), opens for me. Cliff points to the outlet, near some dried bud on a shelf. "Just watch the medicine," he cautions.

Silver-haired Cliff was a high-flying mortgage banker before the market collapsed. His ex-wife thinks his new job is a joke. "I tell her when she pays my bills, she can tell me how to earn my money," he growls. Cliff's a patient too—he smokes for pain he suffers from having once broken a hip. I ask him if he really smokes for his hip, or for fun. "For my hip, of course," he says, permitting a grin. His injury must not be too debilitating. He's playing in a baseball game that evening, but won't smoke beforehand, because, "I don't want any excuse if I mis-hit." Still, he says, "It relieves chronic pain, doesn't get rid of it—but takes your mind off it for a couple hours."

So does bourbon, I tell him. Not only can it make you forget your pain, both outer and inner, but some scientists even say it has cancer-killing antioxidants. Still, we don't pretend it's medicine.

"I love drinkin'," Cliff admits. But citing a referendum that was slated to be on the ballot in November and has since been killed, which would've permitted all residents of Detroit to legally possess an ounce of marijuana for personal use, he adds, "We just need to decriminalize it."

Sure, I say, jabbing. Because that's exactly what a city with 15 percent unemployment that's as chronically crime-ridden and dysfunctional as Detroit needs: more drugs. But legalization and decriminalization aren't really where the action is at the moment—medicalizing marijuana is. I tell Cliff that what I'm most struck by is how the medical marijuana movement has euphemized the old glossary. "Users" are now "patients." "Dealers" are "caregivers." And the dope itself? "Medicine!" says Cliff, going for the assist. "There's no more weed. I correct everybody now. Because that's part of getting rid of the stigma. It's *medicine*."

Cliff has a lot of company in seeing it that way. In California, for instance, pot is a $17 billion-a-year industry (the state's most lucrative crop), and could become much bigger if Prop. 19 passes in November, legalizing limited possession and growth for all individuals, and allowing for taxa-

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tion. Even now there are an estimated quarter of a million medical marijuana users in the state. And the top reason for which it's being prescribed isn't cancer or AIDS—which are cited habitually by advocates of medicinal pot—but "chronic pain" (40 percent).

As of this spring, of the 33,000 medical users in Oregon, 29,500 are being treated for pain (muscle spasms and nausea follow distantly, still ahead of cancer and HIV/AIDS). In Colorado, medical marijuana is such the rage that Colorado Springs has started taxing it. Denver now has more dispensaries than Starbucks, the *Denver Post* reports. With that much "medicine" available, no wonder Denver's alternative paper went so far as to hire a medical marijuana reviewer. And in California's Bay Area this year, *High Times* magazine held their first ever Medical Cannabis Cup to pick the best medical marijuana from local dispensaries. Which says most of what you need to know about the wink-and-nudge nature of medical weed. Imagine a critic being hired to review, say, thyroid medications, or for those medications to have names like *High Times* winners "God's Pussy" and "Durban Poison."

Back to school: a lecture at Med Grow's cannabis college

'STONERS WIN'

Though the medicalized cannabis industry in Michigan is in its infancy, business is brisk. James McCurtis, a spokesman for the Michigan Department of Community Health, tells me they've received or renewed 54,765 applications since the program's inception in April 2009. Though he has no current stats on how many caregivers (i.e., pot providers) that entails, 27,755 patient registrations have been issued, and there is a three-month backlog. McCurtis says they get up to 900 applications per day.

Except for the backlog, these are not hard tickets to secure. Only one out of every eight applicants has been turned down. A state court of appeals judge recently lamented in a decision, "Michigan will soon have more registered marijuana users than we do unemployed—an incredible legacy for the Great Lakes State."

While Med Grow's house doctor requires documentation to back up a claim for a malady before he writes recommendations for state certification, that is not always the case elsewhere. As Cliff freely admits, "It's basically a doctor's opinion [the state] is relying on," he says. "Doctors are held harmless. . . . So you go to a chiropractor, pay him for some X-rays, tell him your back is hurting you. Then make another doctor appointment, bring your X-rays, so you can document that you've had some chronic pain. You may have to do one or two visits. But it wouldn't take you long."

Whether pot actually works as medicine is a scientific tit-for-tat too tortured and voluminous to replicate here. Suffice it to say that hardliners on both sides of the issue have blood-red fingertips from cherry-picking the literature.

Just as an example, as a recent Congressional Research Service report on the subject reminds us, the FDA in 2006 declared that "smoked marijuana is harmful" and hadn't been approved "for any condition or disease," nor have the data "supported the safety or efficacy of marijuana for general medical use." Plenty took issue, saying the FDA ignored the findings of a 1999 Institute of Medicine Report, which reviewed all existing studies on cannabis's therapeutic value, and which many cast as a victory for the pro-medicine forces, even if the conclusions were an on-the-one-hand, on-the-other-hand affair. The report stated that until a "non-smoked rapid-onset cannabinoid drug delivery system becomes available, we acknowledge there is no clear alternative for people suffering from chronic conditions that might be relieved by smoking marijuana, such as pain or AIDS-wasting," but also that "smoked marijuana is unlikely to be a safe medication for any chronic medical condition."

Still, if THC—the main psychoactive component of marijuana—has *no* medical benefit for things such as

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appetite stimulation in chemotherapy patients, why did the FDA approve the pill Marinol in 1985, a synthetic form of THC that provides some of old-fashioned marijuana's benefits without the smoking hazards?

Both sides often resort to caricature. The hardliners become *Reefer Madness* scolds who say the only thing marijuana is good for is making you a slow-witted paranoid criminal and a prime candidate for drug-addiction. They're often completely unsympathetic to any possible medicinal benefits, even though it is a plant found in nature. Poison ivy is too, they'll point out, and we don't go around putting that in our mouths.

The pro-pot side can exhaust you just as quickly. Give them a hearing, and they're likely to go on hours-long gassy harangues in which they play George Washington Carver with cannabis as their peanut. They can recite a litany of the industrial uses of hemp (technically different from what you smoke), when at heart, they're not interested in making twine or yoga mats—they just want to roll fatties and get baked. The slightly more sophisticated treat it as a miracle drug than can do everything from eradicating hangnails to improving your credit score. Am I exaggerating? Not by much. One California medical cannabis specialist, the late Dr. Tod Mikuriya, gave marijuana credit for treatment of over 250 indications, right down to attention deficit disorder, sinusitis, carpal tunnel syndrome, pre-menstrual stress, and alcohol dependency.

Like Steinbeck's Dust Bowl Okies who pushed west for a more promising life picking fruit, students have come from as far away as Florida and even the Czech Republic to learn the ins and outs of Michigan's new miracle crop.

Where all sides can find agreement is that medicalizing marijuana does wonders for its image. The pro-legalization Marijuana Policy Project, a D.C.-based outfit that was the architect of the Medical Marijuana Act that passed in Michigan, admits as much. Dan Riffle, a legislative analyst with the group tells me, "I think people still assume that politically [marijuana] is toxic, and don't want to touch it. Which is shocking, because it passed with 63 percent of the vote. Slowly but surely, I think politicians think it's not toxic."

Riffle cites a recent ABC/*Washington Post* poll showing people support medical marijuana at 81 percent. "I don't know anything that polls at 81 percent in this country. I don't even know that God polls at 81 percent." (He later sends a Fox News poll saying 85 percent of Americans believe in God, "so it's within the margin of error," Riffle clarifies.)

On the other side of the divide, a former Office of National Drug Control Policy official whom I'll call Smoky, basically concurs with his archnemesis, with caveats. "As soon as you publicly say pot is dangerous, you're *Reefer Madness* guy. Nobody wants to be uncool." Still, Smoky says, settling into his rant, most people don't support legalization, which only polls at around 33 percent. But Smoky says the legitimization of marijuana is happening anyway, in three steps:

> (1) Straight-up marijuana legalization is a political loser. Has been, is, will be. (Sorry Reasonoids, hippies, Barney Frank, Comicbook Store Guy, Bill Maher, you just need to get over this.) Which leads to . . .
> (2) Well . . . how 'bout if we sell it as "medical"? Turns out —no surprise—when you ask people if their fellow citizens dying of cancer-AIDS should be allowed to have a puff or two during their last moments, most Americans say sure, why not? Which leads to . . .
> (3) Profit.

So, Smoky continues, "You have something (de facto legalization) that most people don't want. They *really* won't want it once the consequences (increased drug use, dependency, accidents, mental illness, stupider kids, less efficient workers) become clearer. But by that point the economic infrastructure will be in place to prevent a rollback. Stoners win. Everyone else loses. And I know you know there will be no tax revenue from any of this," he adds facetiously. "Still, a violation of federal criminal law, bro."

'YOU NEED A GOOD CPA'

At Med Grow, on my first day of school, I take a seat at a table, waiting for classmates who range in age from their mid-twenties to their early sixties, to file inside to the classic rock strains of Led Zeppelin's "Kashmir" and Blues Image's "Ride Captain Ride." Like Steinbeck's Dust Bowl Okies who pushed west for a more promising life picking fruit, students have come from as far away as Florida and even the Czech Republic to learn the ins and outs of Michigan's new miracle crop.

The seatmate to my immediate right is a 32-year-old African-American woman who chooses "Komiko" as her fake name. She just graduated from the University of Michigan with a history major and a minor in communications. But Komiko lives in Ann Arbor, where the job market has cratered. She's debated going to law school or getting a teaching certificate, but decided to sell medical marijuana instead. "I just want to make

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money and pay off these student loans." She has glaucoma herself, and is a transplant from California, "so I know good weed." Komiko has plenty of friends already in the business. "Everybody's doing it in California, it's like an industry. It's so new here in Michigan, so you got to get in on it now. And it's legal? *Please*."

To my left is a concert T-shirt bootlegger from Pittsburgh, who chooses the fake name "John." He pulls in six figures annually traversing the country and hawking illegal T-shirts outside concert venues. He's been shut down by everyone from Jimmy Buffett to Dave Matthews. "They just confiscate your T-shirts. I get ticketed, but it's bulls— ." John looks like he was dressed at the Eminem Fashion Academy (backwards Pirates hat, cubic zirconia earrings) and he makes himself at home, kicking his shoes off to knead his feet, and showing me his girlfriend on Facebook ("Wanna see my lady? She's a *Playboy* model"). John is 25 and looks as healthy as a horse but tells me he has "a lower lumbar condition, anxiety attacks, and nausea," as he wolfs down a sausage McMuffin.

Because of these ailments, "I smoke six, seven blunts a day," John says. And he doesn't buy low-quality street weed, either. "I only smoke good weed." Since good weed can go for about 400 bucks an ounce, and typically isn't covered by Blue Cross/Blue Shield, it can be an expensive regimen. But John doesn't seem worried. That's why he's here: "To make a lot of money, grow a lot of pot. I'm thinking of moving here." When I ask him how he'll get patients, which he needs to do first in order to become a certified caregiver, he says, "Easy. I'll just go to compassion clubs"—private meeting places which serve as support groups for patients and caregivers and where people often smoke their medicine. "It's like an AA meeting," John says. Except that people aren't trying to quit.

When I ask 'John' how he'll get patients, which he needs to do first in order to become a certified caregiver, he says, 'Easy. I'll just go to compassion clubs'—private meeting places which serve as support groups for patients and caregivers. 'It's like an AA meeting,' John says. Except that people aren't trying to quit.

Roughly half of our instruction time is commandeered by Graham. I would tell you his last name, but I'm not exactly sure what it is. I see two Grahams on my printed materials—a Lowe and a Wallis. When I ask Graham which one he is, he says it doesn't matter. They're both fake names, but "anyone named Graham is me."

Graham has multiple forearm tattoos, wears T-shirts with inscriptions such as "It's fun to use learning for evil," and is a weed genius. If you need to know the difference between phototropism and phyllotaxy, Graham is your man, since he has a good 15 years of "horticulture experience," as they say in the business. Where he got that experience, considering it's only been legal in Michigan for less than two years, "I'll never tell. I ain't incriminating my damn self."

When not lecturing on the amount of wattage needed in grow-rooms or the demands of growing hydroponically, he hands out homework assignments, which everyone massively cheats on, sharing answers. (It is, after all, pot school.) When Graham asks them to turn in assignments, he illustrates how many who are now joining this legal racket still feel rather illegal about it: "Make sure your name is on it. I don't care if it's a fake name. Just make sure you answer when I call out your fake name."

But it's not a hobbyist's class. The other half of the syllabus involves a steady stream of suit-and-tie wearing outsiders, coming in to firehose us with information, then passing out cards to generate business. A financial planner from AXA Advisors tells us, "We want to make sure we show you the difference between tax avoidance and tax evasion. It's about 20 years."

"You need a good CPA, you need a good attorney," says the planner. And of course, if this industry booms, he says, "what do you think the state's gonna wanna do? Tax the revenue, right? When those changes arise, we like to specialize in specific industries so that we know how it's going to be impacted. . . . Confidentiality is off the chart with us."

Accountant Brent Jones, in between relating the importance of keeping receipts for fertilizers and other expenses, tells the class they may want to think about expanding their "caregiver" business into other holistic services, to make it more legitimate. The students are confused. Cultivating a patient's marijuana plants *is* the service. Maybe so, says Jones, but it's still federally illegal, so "the IRS would have a problem with that, because in their eyes, it's just a distribution network."

"So we gotta lie to the IRS?" gasps one student. "We're going to have problems?"

"I'm saying you could," says Jones. "I'm making you aware of it. I'm telling everyone keep your nose clean and dot your 'i's. There's no simple solution. This is frontier, here." He hastens to add, he's not giving medical or legal advice. No matter, the school brings in a doctor and a lawyer for that.

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'DR. GREEN' AND THE 'CANNABIS COUNSEL'

Dr. Green, as he asks to be called, has his own practice but also does exams on-site at the school to qualify patients for state cards. As pot doctors go, he's a seemingly reluctant champion of the medicine, reviewing for the class lists of the maladies that can qualify patients under the statute, while throwing in a skeptical two cents.

Marijuana's great for Alzheimer's agitation, he says. If your disoriented elder loved one keeps trying to leave the house and wander off, "Make Grandpa a brownie" and "maybe he'll calm down and sit on the couch." For rheumatism and arthritis? "Ehhh . . . I don't know," Green says. For cardiac patients? "Any cannabis can increase your heart rate. . . . It may not be beneficial." For chronic pain? "It works reasonably well. I don't think it's the best pain reliever in the world. But some people are going to argue with me that it takes away their pain—fantastic." Also, he doesn't recommend smoking it—use vaporizers or edibles. Because, warns Green, "it can increase the risk of chronic lung disease, emphysema, and may increase the risk of throat and/or lung cancer."

This could depress a regular medicine smoker. Unfortunately, Green doesn't think pot would help that depression: "If you're depressed, you really think going home, smoking a joint and sitting on the couch is going to be beneficial? I don't think that's going to motivate most people. But at this point, there's no approval for that anyway." All that said, if you want to get your medical card, Green says, "I need a little bit of paperwork to show me what's going on. Look, I'm open-minded. I wouldn't be here if I didn't think it was beneficial, all right? But I still need something."

One of the problems with Michigan's marijuana statute is that it is a total hash, to borrow one of the requisite bad puns all visiting writers indulge in when expounding on this subject. Both supporters and detractors agree that the law is mum on everything from how to get plants (federal law prohibits you from buying seeds) to whether dispensaries are even allowed to sell, meaning the estimated 40-100 currently operating in Michigan may be doing so illegally. This is no small issue. Much of the profit these caregivers could see after selling the requested amount to their patients would come from selling their overages to dispensaries, which would then mark up the product and sell it to other patients.

Local lawyer Matt Abel, who specializes in marijuana cases, as his Cannabis Counsel banner on the classroom wall not-so-subtly advertises, answers all sorts of questions,

Building to Compete

By Thomas J. Donohue
President and CEO
U.S. Chamber of Commerce

The U.S. Chamber has long sounded the alarm about our nation's crumbling transportation infrastructure. We've cited the economic costs of congestion, the lives needlessly lost, and the negative impact on our global competitiveness. We've called attention to the gap between what's needed to fund a modern system and what we're actually investing. And we've emphasized the hundreds of thousands of good-paying jobs that could be created if we modernized our highways, transit systems, airports, seaports, waterways, and rails.

But no one has ever made a direct link between the performance of our transportation infrastructure and economic growth—until now.

The U.S. Chamber's newly released *Transportation Performance Index* proves for the first time ever a *direct* relationship between transportation infrastructure performance and GDP.

Why is this important? Because without stronger economic growth, we will *not* create the 20 million jobs we need by the end of this decade. Likewise, without adequate transportation systems, we will fall behind our global competitors who are racing ahead.

If we embrace the status quo and fail to make needed investments, the future will be grim. If we don't change course, the *Index* projects that over the next five years the economy could forgo as much as $336 billion in lost growth as transportation networks continue to deteriorate.

Fortunately, there is another path. By making the necessary investments and implementing needed reforms, we can transform our transportation networks, making it far easier for people and goods to move quickly and safely across the country and around the world. So how do we move forward on rebuilding America?

First, we need Congress and the administration to pass pending legislation to fund highway and transit, water, and aviation systems while supporting investment in freight railroads. Without the necessary investments, these systems will further deteriorate, threatening our mobility and our safety.

Second, policymakers must eliminate the red tape that endlessly delays and raises project costs. Let's streamline the project review and approval processes to ensure that improvements to the transportation system are finished in a timely and environmentally sound manner.

Finally, we must look to the private sector to help finance infrastructure projects. There is upward of $180 billion in private capital just waiting to be invested if only we swept away regulatory roadblocks.

A renewed commitment to a strong infrastructure network would bolster economic growth, create jobs, and improve our global competitiveness. It's time to get on with it.

U.S. Chamber of Commerce Comment at www.chamberpost.com.

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dispensing advice such as, "A party—that's not a medical use. So if you're having a gathering of patients, it's inadvisable to call it a party." When someone asks if you can freeze marijuana to make sure you don't go over medicine-possession limits, he says, "Look, if you can't figure out what to do with cannabis, maybe you shouldn't be growing it. The whole idea is to market this stuff, not keep it in your freezer. . . . The dispensaries are saying the most serious issue in opening one is supply."

When I press him on the ins and outs of running a dispensary, since state law is mute on it, Abel starts answering my questions, then abruptly stops, saying: "God, I feel like I'm going over the line telling people how to operate a dispensary. It's interesting. I just don't want to conspire with you to violate federal law in front of 100 people! I value my law license. . . . Look, I'm a lawyer. You run the damn business!"

Not for nothing does Abel call Michigan at the moment "the wild, wild Midwest." He also indemnifies himself: "If you think I encouraged anyone here to do anything illegal, let me know, because my job is to make sure you comply with the law." Which is why you can hire him to help you set up a dispensary for a $40,000 retainer, or for $300 an hour on other matters, though "when my new office gets done, no doubt it's going to go up."

Other professors are more gung-ho. Mark Bankes, a peppy Tony Robbins type and self-described "serial entrepreneur," tells us, "Many people are here because it's a business, not because of their love of the product. Pure and simple they're here because this is an opportunity to make 250 grand a year, and potentially upwards of a half million."

Taking a break to make a phone call, I see my tablemate, Pittsburgh John, working the phone in the lobby, looking for a doctor to certify him in Michigan. He suggests I should get certified, too. I tell him I don't have any ailments, plus, I'm from out of state. "So am I," says John. "That doesn't matter!" I tell John if he gets an appointment, he'll miss an important business lecture. "I ain't worried about business," he shrugs, "this stuff sells itself."

THE DEALER VS. THE CAREGIVER

After class one evening, I take a field trip to meet with a care provider. All right, he's not a care provider, he's an old-fashioned drug dealer. He still just has "customers." He doesn't have any "patients" yet, but he'll get some when he gets certified, after he becomes a patient himself. "It's either going to be migraine headaches or chronic back pain, both of which I suffer from, I just haven't chosen one," he says.

The dealer tells me to call him Herb Moore, "because when you sign that name backwards—more herb!" He's a friend of a friend of mine. My friend we'll call Applejack, since we're meeting in his backyard, where he swigs from homemade applejack. Applejack is miffed that he can't legally make his own hooch, but Herb will soon be able to legally grow his own pot. "Yeah, I got my medical marijuana card," Applejack says, caustically. "You know what it's for? To regulate my anxiety while I'm smoking crack."

Herb is of two minds about the medical marijuana industry. On the one hand, it will give him a cloak of legitimacy if his illegal operation gets busted, so long as he's holding a card. While that doesn't guarantee he won't go to jail, it improves his chances, and he figures the DEA is generally less likely to kick doors down around these parts with the influx of so many medical growers. "It's easier to handle your product," he says.

Conversely, with the glut of legal growers, more product means lower prices. Less risk, less reward. Also, there's just too many amateurs. Herb grows organically in soil, and says, "If it roughly smells like the skunk variety, people think it's good. Even though it's f—ing inferior." Plus, a lot of the medical growers are getting unfair access to his market. Some patients say, "'Give me an ounce or so a month, and you can have my 12-plant allowance to grow,'" says Herb. "That's how the hustle is working."

Applejack does some quick back-of-the-envelope calculations. He estimates 12 plants, timed to harvest intermittently, could yield two pounds of usable bud a month. If you flat-out give your patient an ounce per month, you could make $4,500 per month off just one patient's plants. And you're allowed four more patients—five, if you include yourself. Making it quite possible to gross over $300,000 a year working, more or less, within the state system.

Still, Herb moans, "It introduces inferior products to market—"

"Medicine!" Applejack interjects.

"Medicine," says Herb, standing corrected. "And basically there's too much product going around. The street prices are going down."

With our drinks running low, Herb pulls out a baggie of Mystic, all purple hairs and glistening trichomes, and asks, "Wanna smoke some herb with Herb?" I decline. I thank Herb, but tell him I never touch the stuff, figuring it will only get in the way of more important things like work, family, and drinking.

Herb exhales a cloud of smoke, and tries to locate what's eating him about the new medicine show: "Maybe it's the fact that I need my respect. People nowadays can get their card and start up doing whatever. I paid my dues. Put my time in. I've dodged the freakin' law for all these f—in' years. I just don't want them putting bad product on the market and f—in' with all the prices."

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THE ENTREPRENEURS

It would be easy to assume that all new entrants into the industry are coming to it in bad faith. Not so, I learn from my classmates back at school. There are guys like Bob Nead, a cable-contractor from Ohio who admits he smokes about a quarter of an ounce a week for his shot knee, as he prefers that to popping Vicodin—it helps him sleep. He wants to become a caregiver to his terminally ill aunt and to provide a better living for his two children.

But, he says, after he gets certified, he's not giving any to friends, and is going to find genuinely sick patients. "I don't want to break any kind of laws. I want to be totally legit," he says, even if he thinks it's foolish to criminalize pot. "It's not like I'm going to go out and shoot people 'cause I smoked a joint. You're too lazy to pick up the gun." (I hear some version of this defense a couple of dozen times over the course of my stay, and it's probably true, for the most part. Though it's worth noting that, according to crime statistics kept by the ADAM II law-enforcement database, more people arrested for violent crimes tested positive for marijuana than for any other drug—meaning Bob is wrong that everybody on weed is as peace-loving as he is. At the very least, he owes an apology to heroin and cocaine users.)

Then there's gray-haired Dave, who is 58, lost his job over a year ago as a general manager of a plastic recycling company, and got into this not knowing if he could go back to work. The last time he smoked pot "was a little, in college." He doesn't like it—"it makes me paranoid." But if this takes off, he'll run his business "like a Boy Scout." After all, he's a pillar of his community, sits on boards, and used to be the head usher at his church. He has a reputation to think about—which is why he's not telling anyone he's here.

There's Bulldog, a 32-year-old Oklahoma City native, so named because he trains dogs. The only time he ever smoked pot was "three or four times in high school after the beer was gone. And I got sick." He now has bad knees from laying tile and working dogs, and can't make ends meet even with his college-degree-holding wife, so he's looking to start over. Lately, he's been reduced to delivering pizzas to support his family, a job he had in high school, except he made more money back then because "people still tipped."

There's Anastasia ("That's a pretty fake name," I compliment. "Thank you," she responds). Anastasia is a sunshiny black woman who wears bright pastel Sunday-morning clothes to class. I tell her she looks like a church lady. "That's because I am," she says. She's actually a reverend's wife, and is such an innocent, she's never smoked a cigarette. "We don't even drink," she says. "The closest we come is a virgin strawberry daiquiri."

She and her husband are good Christians, and she only wants really sick patients who are also good Christians. "So that they know they're buying Christian marijuana?" I ask, somewhat smartly. But Anastasia will not be deterred. She understands people will be cynical. She's cynical herself, in some ways. But "life has changed for us." In the last few years, with their family restaurant folding and her caretaker job about to come to an end, they've lost the majority of their income and need a new lifeline. So she plans on making marijuana-laced edibles for terminally ill patients. She and her husband prayed over it, and found peace because it's now legal. Still, she's not telling anyone, and worries that it looks like "we're becoming dope dealers. We're just looking to help others, and ourselves at the same time."

Tools of the trade: This is not your father's pharmacy.

Not everyone's quite so innocent. Stoney D (fake name) lost his job as an autoworker about a year ago, and says, "When my boss handed me my pink slip, I smiled." He was tired "of being strapped to a machine inside of a shop." Now he says he can do what he loves. "Taking your medicine and playing Xbox?" chimes in his pal, Nick, a hospital transporter standing next to us on a (cigarette) smoke break. Stoney intimates that he already moved medicine a bit before, saying because of the clandestine nature of the business, many of the best friends he's ever made are the people he smokes with. But he is grateful for the legal cover now, being a patient for gastritis and hiatal hernia, even if he thinks buying your medicine at a dispensary is kind of a joke.

"They have all the little people walking around in white

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coats like they're pharmacists or dentists or something. It's like, 'Just bring me back to the counter where the weed's at. Enough with the dog and pony show.' But they've been making us jump through hoops for years, why stop now? As long as we keep 'em off our back."

Stoney and Nick admit they're guilty of several pothead stereotypes. Yes, they like to get baked, eat Cheetos, and watch *Harold & Kumar*. But, Stoney protests, "They say we're unproductive, but how many people are on Facebook all day, playing FarmVille" having no human contact? "Facebook's horrible," Nick amens. "Kids sitting on it all day getting obese because they're drinking Red Bull and eating donuts. Go out and do something! Go out and grow some pot!"

Clinical Relief: Would you like the Grape Skunk or Sour Diesel?

"What's worse?" Stoney concludes. "They're two evils. You smoke one and stare at the other." Pot is kind of like Stoney's Facebook. "We use weed to keep up with our friends."

Some stereotypes at Cannabis College die hard. One day, when my classmates are outside on a smoke break, I ask them if they mind my taping an interview. "Don't see why not, that guy's been taping us all week," says one. He points to a white work van across the parking lot which is facing us, and sure enough, it looks like a police stakeout van. I go over to check, and all I see inside are tools and an empty Tim Hortons cup.

But the following day, we do see someone sitting inside the van, staring at us. We huddle conspiratorially, until a female classmate walks out, sizes up the situation, and says, "He's in our class, you paranoid schizophrenics." Indeed, he is. The van man isn't a cop, but a painter from Indiana.

Others, however, don't conform to stereotype at all. One evening, I meet the school's owner, Nick Tennant, at a Royal Oak restaurant. Wearing a T-shirt, shorts, and Crocs, he insists he's 24 8/9ths years old, but looks so young that he whips his driver's license out for the waitress before he orders his Pilsner, since her asking is a given. I figure I'm in for a night of the usual pothead rigamarole, but I'm not.

Tennant tells me he smokes a little as a patient for food intolerances, but that marijuana doesn't motivate him—he saw a window of opportunity after his auto-detailing business started failing, and took it. Since he likes to spend hour upon hour on Google researching new business ideas, he figures he'll be onto something else soon enough. I tell him he sounds like some kind of Republican. In fact, he is, he grudgingly admits. He voted for McCain over Obama. "Fiscally, it made sense, right?" he says.

Tennant also surprises me by saying while he's personally not against legalization—a wastrel will be a wastrel whether cannabis is available or not—he doesn't think we're ready to do so: "We have no regulatory system. We have no taxation system. Everything is very ambiguous. It's a wild west type thing. How do you know if the guy driving down the street is stoned out of his mind? There's no field sobriety test to see if someone's completely wasted behind the wheel. These are the things that worry me about outright legalization. . . . We're not ready. There's no way. It'd be a detrimental effect on society."

But others aren't so conflicted about the new frontier. One afternoon, I approach a lean thirty-something classmate with a hard stare who wears baggy jeans and seems to know the answers to all the teachers' questions. Hank (fake name) has dealt pot since he was 16 years old, and has even raised a family of five doing so. He also did a year in prison for getting caught. So Hank describes the new reality as "a dream come true—unbelievable." In the old days, you had to look over your shoulder for police. But now he's here in the open, even if "I was reluctant—had to talk to two lawyers before I came out of the dark."

The problem, he says, "is the street is still pulling for you to be illegal." For years, Hank says, "I hung my head in shame. Now, I've got a 16-year-old son, and I told him, you can be a part of this, it's medicine. It's legal." He plans on going legal, too. Kind of. He's telling all his customers to get their cards: "Chronic pain, your back. A byproduct of human evolution. It's a loophole for anybody to get in. Two hundred dollars to a doctor—and cheaper for me because I give them so many referrals. It's a money maker." He's already maxed out on his plants—both as a patient and a caregiver. I ask if any of them are actually sick. He nods, saying, "Back pain."

Right now, he's planning on letting his wife open a dis-

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pensary; he's forbidden to, having a federal drug charge in his jacket. But he's in the background, cultivating his famed Lemon strain ("we're like local legends in Detroit") and selling his overage to dispensaries. Like Tennant, Hank's not overly enthusiastic about legalization, but for different reasons. "If the big guys get in [meaning corporations], the little guy is done." Though the big guys "can never mass produce the superior strain. We handcraft." So with his skills, he figures even in that nightmare scenario, he'll still be okay—either functioning as a niche brand, or hired by the corporations.

Hank is giving all his illegal customers two months to get their cards through the state, then "I'm not messin' with nobody." He's even thinking about opening a grow school himself. "I want my kids to be proud of me. I have a skill," Hank says, beaming. "Before, it felt like I was a loser. Now, I'm a professor."

DUELING DISPENSARIES

To further my education, I take a field trip to see two dispensaries. The first, in Ferndale, a Detroit suburb in Oakland County, is called Clinical Relief. Though state law makes no provision for dispensaries, Ferndale has passed an ordinance permitting them. Before I go, I am screened by its lawyer, Paul Tylenda, who tells me the dispensary wants to "maintain image control."

When I get there, I'm met by Tylenda and one of three co-owners, Ryan Richmond, both in suits. The "clinic" sits in a sleepy neighborhood complex, at the end of which resides the office for Alcoholics Anonymous. "There is an argument that marijuana is a good step-down drug from alcohol," Tylenda says. They show me how people are buzzed in through a security door, and we enter a nouveau-industrial space which looks a bit like a Chipotle burrito restaurant, only with employees walking around in white doctor-coats.

They primly walk me through the process of consultations and paperwork and credential-checking. They tell me nobody is permitted to smoke on-site, and show me one of the bags they heat-seal the marijuana in to discourage any on-premises use. The gentlemen seem cautious to the point of paranoia. Not only did Richmond make sure his lawyer was there, but he also tapes our interview on his phone, and tells me, "We're very conscious of state law. . . . We've got 10 guys like Paul telling us what to do here. . . . Everyone assumes we're instant millionaires, but we're walking on eggshells."

They are so self-conscious, in fact, they would not permit me to come during office hours since I don't have a medical marijuana card, nor did they have the medicine displayed in the dispensary shelves. When I ask what strains they carry, Richmond instructs an employee to give "the most normal sounding names." A woman behind a pharmacy-like counter struggles, but the most CVS-sounding brands she can come up with are Master Kush, Grape Skunk, and Sour Diesel. When another manager walks up on me taking photos of the empty shelves with Richmond's permission, he almost has an aneurysm, and tells me to put the camera away.

Tylenda, Richmond, and I commiserate about the vagueness of the law, and the don't-ask-don't-tell nature of where the medical marijuana is supposed to originate (again, one cannot even purchase seeds, as though plants are supposed to fall from the sky). Still, says Richmond, "You look at some of these clubs, Puff Daddy's and the Green Spot—what's our name? Clinical Relief. You're not going to see a Cheech and Chong movie here. That's the stigma we're trying to get away from. The '70s didn't help. It's our biggest hurdle—the stigma of marijuana." On the way out, I pass a patient in a wheelchair waiting to get buzzed in. All told, the operation seems by the book—if there were a book to go by.

My second experience comes with an operation that seems to run a little more loosely—a medical marijuana delivery service based in downtown Detroit. I find the Ant Farm Compassion Club through potlocator.com. Its website says that it allows one free delivery per day and depicts an old third-world woman smoking a joint the size of an overweight chinchilla, with an animated ant asking, "Where da good stuff?" It also contains reviews of the medicines of the week, such as Purple Crack and OG Kush. ("Believe the hype; believe that you will be severly [sic] couch-locked if not borderline catatonic. Belive [sic] in the OG Kush.")

The proprietor, Ant himself, seems amenable over the phone to my going out on a run with his guys. He gives me detailed directions to meet his deliveryman outside a Rite-Aid on 8 Mile Road. I drive there as instructed, past check-cashing places and liquor stores and check-cashing liquor stores, for those who prize one-stop efficiency. Outside the Rite-Aid, I visibly hold a notebook, so that Ant's guys can tell who the reporter is, though the fact that I'm the only white guy for miles around might be a tip-off. An SUV stops in front of me, and rolls down the window, but it's not them. The driver just wants to know if I'm a cop.

Ant's men finally arrive, and I jump in their SUV, with a marijuana-leaf cinnaberry air freshener and a pack of Newports on the dash. I am greeted by Neil, who is driving, and Justice, who sits in the backseat with a leather briefcase containing the medicine. They both wear black dress slacks, ties, and crisp white shirts, and look like Jehovah's Witnesses going on a drug run. When I ask Neil if they did deliveries even before the product officially became medicine, Neil says, "Well, uh, I'll let Ant answer that one for us." Justice, sitting in the backseat, says, "Hey, I plead the Fifth."

As we drive to the first delivery point on the East Side,

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Ant's men review the procedures of how they check medical cards and won't deliver if a patient doesn't have one. I ask if they've been muscled by old-school dealers who might feel their turf is threatened. "No," says Justice. "Ain't nobody do that no more. Times are hard." I ask if the men are worried about getting rousted by cops, and they say no. But when one drives by, Neil instructs, "Put your seatbelt on, they real sticky here about those seatbelts." Justice adds, "You don't want to come here on vacation and go back on probation."

One of the deliveries we make is to a big shambling house in a run-down historic neighborhood. Neil makes me wait in the truck during the medication hand-off (today's strains are G-Thai and Purple Crack, they tell me). But the man we are delivering to, Firefighter, agrees to have me in for an interview. He asks to be called Firefighter, since that's what he is. And while much of the medical marijuana game is about conceits and appearances, not so for Firefighter. As he fries shrimp on the stove for his three toddlers, and pops a Bud Light for me, he lays it bare.

He's been a legal patient for nine months, but he's been an illegal patient since he was 17. "It helped me through college, it helped me through divorce, it just helps me cope," says Firefighter. He says of getting a card, "It's a joke. For some people it's not. Some need it for cancer. . . . " Then he smiles, continuing, "for eyesight, bad day, stressed out. I got three kids with two baby mommas—don't say baby momma cause my girl hates that. I have a girlfriend I love very much who is also a patient.

"But I think it's a farce, 'cause I know a guy who literally calls himself the Budtender. He goes to local concert events. Walks in with like two, three pounds. With all the cards that he has [from caregiver and patient cut-outs], he can carry up to four-and-a-half, almost five pounds of marijuana. Day I saw him, this motherf— had 17 different types of herb in a roll-up backpack. Everything from White Widow to you name it. It was ridiculous."

As for his own personal use, no patient is supposed to hold more than 2.5 ounces at a time, according to law. But of course, there's nothing stopping them from procuring 2.5 ounces or less, from either their caregiver or a dispensary, as many times as they want. So Firefighter says, "I have five or six different outlets I can go to with my card. I have five different strains in the house now." When I ask if he isn't worried about being over his allowance, he nods, saying, "Oh, definitely. But by the end of the evening, I'll be good."

After midnight, I meet Ant for dinner at the Harbor House restaurant downtown. "It's right next to the police station," Ant tells me. He and a biker friend, Canary Yellow, arrive on motorcycles to join me, Neil, and Justice. Ant looks a bit like the late rapper Biggie Smalls, and wears a tent-sized T-shirt with a black Red-Cross style cross on it, a Rocawear hat, and sparkly Cartier glasses. Canary Yellow sings like a canary, too. When a Sinatra song comes on at the karaoke bar, he makes up new words: *I wanna be a part of it / Detroit, Detroit.*

Ant was intent on ordering the all-you-can-eat crab legs. But since the restaurant closes in 45 minutes, our waitress, Vanessa, suggests we might not have enough time. "Then you gonna have to work hard for us, baby," says Ant. Though he boasts of having over 10 years of horticulture experience, Ant sets up one interview ground rule: "Nothing about anything before the law."

When the crab legs come, along with Ant's Electric Lemonade, Ant has us all grab hands as he prays, "Keep your arms of protection around us. Guide our minds and our decisions. In Jesus' name, amen." Ant runs me through how he's completely legal. "We doin' all right," he says. Still, he adds, "You gotta keep your numbers together. It's legal, but you still got a lot of people gunning for you. It's still fresh for a lot of law enforcement. . . . You don't want to do anything to put a flag on yourself."

Ant himself is a patient—for an arthritic knee. He's tried Vicodin, but it upsets his stomach, so he prefers to hit the OG Kush "and feel no pain." Of the glut of newcomers to the industry, he says, "You got 50 percent of the people right now who don't have a clue what the hell they're doin'. They're just tryin' to fake it until they make it. Doesn't matter to me, because you can't match up with my quality."

Ant tells Vanessa the business he's in, and asks if she has a patient card. "No," Vanessa says. "But I'd like to get one. I actually want to be a grower." She's looked into securing two grand to get her grow-room together. Ant turns to me, saying, "You got 25-30 percent of the automotive force doing medical marijuana now. People in this trade used to be plant workers. You get [waitresses] like Vanessa that could grow weed at night at their leisure, go to work at their regular job, bring in an extra 15 thousand a year. How much would 15 thousand help you, Vanessa?"

"I think that's wonderful," Vanessa coos. "That's my plan!"

THE SHERIFF STRIKES BACK

A few days after I visit the two dispensaries, one of them is busted by Oakland County law enforcement. Have a guess which one? Wrong. It was Clinical Relief, caught up in a sweep by authorities, just days after Ferndale okayed dispensaries. A total of 17 people from three facilities were rounded up, including two of Ryan Richmond's co-owners. Police charged employees with selling marijuana to customers without state cards, as well as selling outside the dispensary.

The Oakland County sheriff, Mike Bouchard, cried out for clarity from the legislature, saying the law does not

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permit dispensaries, and selling pot is still a federal crime. "This is Michigan, not some Cheech and Chong movie," he said at a news conference.

When I call Clinical Relief lawyer Paul Tylenda, he's happy to tell me the usual drug-enforcement horror stories: how the charges are "bulls—," how his clients' homes were ransacked, how their children had guns drawn on them, how the cops even took money out of the kids' piggy banks, how undercover officers posed as patients with proper identification, how, oh yeah, there was one employee trying to undercut Clinical Relief's price by selling to a patient in the parking lot ("he would have been thrown out on his ear if anybody had known about it"), and how his clients, after making bail, even had to buy back their seized cars from "the Sarge's used car lot." If convicted, his clients could face years in jail for doing what they thought the law permitted, or at least didn't prohibit.

Sheriff Bouchard, when reached by phone, denies the horror stories. He says he's not confused about the law: "There is no place to legally buy marijuana in the state. If there's no place to legally buy medical marijuana, it's illegal to buy medical marijuana." The city of Ferndale smiling on such activities with ordinances doesn't matter to him. "You cannot zone illegal activity into legality, you can no more zone for a dispensary than you can for a cocaine or heroin shop. . . . We're the referees, we enforce the rules. If you don't like the rules, go to Lansing or to the voters and get them changed."

Michigan Court of Appeals judge Peter O'Connell, in a nonbinding opinion in an unrelated medical marijuana case, expressed a take similar to Bouchard's, taking 30 pages to painstakingly eviscerate the Michigan Marijuana Act. He said it makes no provision for the retail sale of medical marijuana, also noting that another judge called it "one of the worst pieces of legislation I have ever seen in my life."

Cannabis lawyer Matt Abel, who lectured in our class, says of the judge's dicta, that he's "going off the deep end. He can write whatever he wants, but it doesn't mean s—." All this, Abel says, is a "sop to the Supreme Court to beg them to adopt his crazy-ass arguments. . . . I ain't afraid of him. He's full of s—."

So all that is clear at the moment about the promise of dispensaries and the state of Michigan's medical marijuana industry is that nothing is clear at all.

Except to Ant, who, after the others' arrest, remains optimistic and undeterred, with a slight change in best practices: "We had some patients we dealt with in Oakland and Macomb counties—they can't get home deliveries anymore. They just have to come down to the city."

Meanwhile, back at Med Grow Cannabis College, I'm sitting in the parking lot in Pittsburgh John's SUV. During class, he needed to medicate himself, and asked if I wanted to come. John pulls an Arby's bag from under the seat which contains his medicine, and his multicolored pipe from his armrest. Possessing only a California medical marijuana card, though he lives in Pittsburgh, he found a Michigan dispensary willing to sell him some anyway.

The Ant Farm Compassion Club: Justice, Canary Yellow, Neil, and Ant

John's cranky, though, because it cost him 70 bucks for an eighth of an ounce, plus a $10 enrollment fee. "It's pretty good stuff. It's the dank," he says, "but it's $80 just for my medication—which I will never, ever, pay again. Ever."

He pulls out of the parking lot, steering with his knee as he toasts up a bowl of Mr. Nice Guy. "Driving under the influence, being high, is like me being normal," he explains. "If you drive drunk all the time, is it really drunk?" I ask, trying to sound sympathetic.

His expression clouds over, or maybe that's just the second-hand smoke, which has some nice blueberry notes. "Yeah," he says, "I guess that is drunk."

After smoking for a while, he goes mellow, and says he's swinging by the gas station to buy a Coke and Swedish Fish. He's already got the munchies. I ask him, by the way, which of his ailments he's medicating. His sore lumbar? His nausea? His anxiety?

The worst one of all, he says, while knee-steering us to the gas station: "boredom." ♦

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Detail from 'The Blessings of Good Government' by Ambrogio Lorenzetti (circa 1340)

ERICH LESSING

Cities of God

Christianity meets culture

BY TERRY EASTLAND

These two books concern the same general and difficult topic, one as old as the early church: the relationship of Christianity to culture. *To Change the World* takes up how Christian believers, their "citizenship in heaven" (as the Apostle Paul put it), should relate in this life to the world around them. James Davison Hunter, a University of Virginia sociologist who came to national attention almost two decades ago with *Culture Wars*, offers a paradigm for Christian engagement that he calls "faithful presence." Accordingly, believers, sharing with nonbelievers a world that is more and more religiously plural-

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To Change the World
The Irony, Tragedy, and Possibility of Christianity in the Late Modern World
by James Davison Hunter
Oxford, 368 pp., $27.95

Natural Law and the Two Kingdoms
A Study in the Development of Reformed Social Thought
by David VanDrunen
Eerdmans, 512 pp., $35

istic, are to seek "its overall flourishing."

Hunter presents his theology of faithful presence having spent much of his book arguing against forms of engagement that seek to transform culture in Christian terms, a quest that often ends up in politics. Because Hunter makes America (actually the America of the past 60 years) the focus of his inquiry, he treats individuals and organizations that will be familiar to an American audience, bluntly telling them "to abandon altogether talk of 'redeeming the culture,' 'advancing the kingdom,' 'building the kingdom,' 'transforming the world,' 'reclaiming the culture,' 'reforming the culture,' and 'changing the world'"—doubtless not an exhaustive list. Neither the Christian right nor the Christian left (Hunter's terms) will be happy with his downbeat assessment of their prospects.

Hunter's critique of what may be called transformationalism begins with a look at what its advocates in America have achieved. And he is not impressed. He finds their record "mixed," and provides reason to think it might not improve. Culture changing, he writes, assumes that if you can change the hearts and minds of enough ordinary

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people, the culture itself will change. But this idea of cultural change is "almost wholly mistaken. . . . [C]ultural change at its most profound level occurs through dense networks of elites operating in common purpose within institutions at the high-prestige centers of cultural production." But believers wanting to change the culture most often have been found working the "social periphery" and not the "cultural center" where those dense networks exist. Their influence has proved strongest where it counts least: "in tastes that run to the lower middle and middle brow rather than the high brow."

Thus, writes Hunter, "for all the talk of world changing . . . the Christian community is not, on the whole, remotely close to a position where it could actually change the world in any significant way." And if it were close, "the results would likely be disastrous." World changing entails the use of power, he says, and transformationalists, regardless of where they reside on our political spectrum, "cannot imagine power in any other way than toward what finally leads to political domination." For them, changing the culture means electing a candidate, passing a law, and altering a policy. To be sure, this being a free country, they may pursue those activities; but too often their efforts seethe with "resentment, anger, and bitterness" for the wrongs they believe they have suffered. As a result, they "undermine the message of the very gospel they cherish and desire to advance."

Natural Law and the Two Kingdoms is a careful explication of a theological tradition that is concerned with the same question *To Change the World* addresses: how believers should relate to this present world. David VanDrunen, a theologian at Westminster Seminary in California who is also a lawyer, reports among the answers to that question the one given by the remarkable Epistle to Diognetus, written in the late second century in the face of a culture hostile to Christianity. It did not presume that society should be Christian or even imagine that "as a goal to be achieved," writes VanDrunen. Of course, that goal did become imaginable in the fourth century, thanks to the conversion of the Emperor Constantine and the empire's embrace of his religion. As a result, when Augustine was writing his great work *The City of God*, he had before him the idea of a Christianized society as "a very real and plausible option." And yet he rejected it. Augustine thus refused to commend to believers a conception of the Christian life that entailed pursuit of a theocratic state—or, in the modern vernacular, a culture transformed.

Regarding Augustine's famous treatment of the City of Man and the City of God, VanDrunen says, "the two cities idea . . . became something of a standard for subsequent Christian reflection on the relation of Christianity to the broader world." That later reflection, treated in detail here, led to the two kingdoms doctrine, the most articulate expression of which came during the Reformation. As VanDrunen describes it, God rules all human institutions and activities but he does so in two fundamentally different ways: God rules the spiritual kingdom expressed in the church "as redeemer in Jesus Christ," and God rules the civil kingdom including the state and all other social institutions not as redeemer but "as creator and sustainer."

Hunter's critique of what may be called transformationalism begins with a look at what its advocates in America have achieved. And he is not impressed.

The two kingdoms, VanDrunen emphasizes, "exist for different purposes, have different functions, and operate according to different rules," and Christian engagement with the civil kingdom (or culture or world) must take those differences into account. In particular, as citizens of the spiritual kingdom, believers submit to "the redemptive ethic of Scripture." But as citizens of the civil kingdom they "can engage in genuine moral conversation with those of other faiths . . . without making adherence to Scripture a test for participating in cultural affairs." Likewise, as citizens of the spiritual kingdom, they "can view the state and other institutions as temporal and destined to pass away." Yet as citizens of the civil kingdom they "can have keen interest in promoting the welfare of human society here and now."

The story VanDrunen tells continues from the Reformation to the present. He includes a fascinating chapter on the fate of the two kingdoms doctrine in the United States that begins in early 17th-century Massachusetts with the Puritan John Cotton (1584-1652). Cotton defended the institutional distinction between church and state, as well as their different functions; yet "these ideas"—central to two kingdoms doctrine—"tended to fade into the background in the face of [Cotton's] zeal to defend civil religion." VanDrunen also presents figures less well remembered than Cotton, among them the 19th-century Kentucky Presbyterian Stuart Robinson (1814-1881), an able defender of two kingdoms who, on theological grounds, not only questioned the authority of government to call upon churches to observe fast days but also opposed calls for a constitutional amendment that would acknowledge God as the source of all power and Jesus Christ as governor of the nations.

Robinson failed to persuade the transformationalists of his day, whose influence was rising. Indeed, as VanDrunen shows, in the late 19th and early 20th centuries, influential theologians in the Reformed tradition sought to provide "a redemptive and eschatological grounding to culture and Christians' participation in it." Inevitably, in the thinking of many of these theologians, the two kingdoms were collapsed into one: "This kingdom," VanDrunen observes, "was originally created by God in perfect righteousness, . . . was corrupted through the fall into sin and is now being redeemed from corruption and advanced toward its eschatological goal" of the new heaven and the new earth. And so, with regard to how believers should engage the world, they "are not to dismiss any area of life as

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outside of God's redemptive concern, and . . . are to seek to transform all activities and institutions in ways that reflect . . . [the kingdom's] final destiny."

Oddly, *To Change the World* has little to say about two kingdoms, notwithstanding its rooting in a millennium and a half of Christian reflection. And what the book does say is a caricature: According to Hunter, the doctrine leads its adherents "to increasingly withdraw into their own communities with less and less interest in any engagement with the larger world." Hunter fails to consider such evidence as VanDrunen has weighed and which supports the proposition that two-kingdoms doctrine encompasses the idea of promoting the welfare of society, or as Hunter himself might say, its "overall flourishing."

That James Davison Hunter has no affinity for two kingdoms would seem surprising, since it is a doctrine that offers no support to the world changers he challenges at every turn. On the other hand, there is an ambiguity in *To Change the World* that makes one wonder whether Hunter's dismissal of two kingdoms is a product of his sympathy for, yes, world changing. The ambiguity arises in his discussion of faithful presence, and it concerns the critical issue of redemption. For while Hunter emphasizes that "culture-making . . . is not, strictly speaking, redemptive or salvific in character," and that "world building" is not to be confused with "building the Kingdom of God," he also says that the church should "offer an alternative vision and direction" for prevailing cultural institutions and seek "to retrieve the good to which modern institutions and ideas implicitly or explicitly aspire." Putting aside whether the church is even capable of offering such vision and direction, or of retrieving such goods, it would seem without authority to do so—unless it is now being charged with (to borrow a phrase) "redeeming the culture."

Such is the allure of transformationalism that one of its most vigorous critics seems unable to abandon it. Even so, Hunter's book is not without its redeeming features, notably a critique of the modern world that strikingly illumines the challenges that "difference" and "dissolution" pose for Christian engagement. Difference, meaning pluralism, "creates social conditions in which God is no longer an inevitability," a development that renders "God-talk" with "little or no resonance" outside the church. Dissolution, meaning "the deconstruction of the most basic assumptions about reality," makes it more difficult to "imagine that there is a spiritual reality more real than the material world we live in."

Likewise, Hunter's theology of faithful presence takes inspiration from the sensible teaching of that Epistle to Diognetus, and before that, from the wise counsel of Jeremiah. In his letter to the exiles living in the very different culture of Babylon—its king a pagan gentile—the prophet exhorted them to "seek [its] welfare" on the ground that "in its welfare you will find your welfare."

David VanDrunen's study is worth commending on account of the achievement it represents, for the two kingdoms doctrine, with its fascinating lineage, has not had the historian of theological acumen it deserved until now.

Taken together, *Natural Law and the Two Kingdoms* and *To Change the World* indicate where discussions of the perennial question of Christian involvement with the broader culture—a question with obvious implications for our politics—seem now to be heading. ♦

B&A

Grief's Echo

An accidental death transforms an Irish family.

BY ANDREW PALMER

The Irish writer Josephine Hart's first novel, *Damage* (1991), an international bestseller and the basis for a movie starring Jeremy Irons and Juliette Binoche, was a slick little thing, a couple hundred propulsive pages of high-society melodrama. Its plot, overblown and solemnly recounted, concerns a British MP who falls inexplicably and obsessively in love with his son's girlfriend (and later fiancée), the most fatal of *femmes fatales*. Clothes are shed, lives are shattered, things will never be the same.

The Truth About Love
by Josephine Hart
Vintage, 225 pp., $14.95

It can be a lot of fun, and Hart knows it—or we hope she knows it. How else to explain passages such as the following?

> I told her dreams in language she alone could understand. A powerful goddess, she whispered yes, yes, through the hours of her imprisonment. In her omnipotence she ruled her enslaved master.

Or: "The day slipped away. And with it departed the man I used to be." Or: "I quietly inscribe on the stone tablet of my heart the name which has gone forever" (this last actually spoken by a character in conversation).

We tolerate, even relish, these ridiculousnesses, because they simultaneously amp up the intensity of the novel and reassure us that the whole thing is only a game. And Hart plays it skillfully, seducing us from one brief chapter to the next with frequent teasers, surprising reversals, and a persistent sense of impending violent demise. We take pleasure in the narrator's fall partly because he lives out a classic male fantasy, partly because he is punished for it. If the writing is sometimes pretentious, it only has the effect of burnishing the smooth surface of the narrator's

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world, thereby heightening our pleasure upon its inevitable rupture.

But this is a generous reading, and *Damage* often resists it. We sense the novel, sometimes, striving to assert and uphold a high seriousness that both its premise and language continually undercut. Nowhere is this more apparent than in the narrator's tendency to generalize and pronounce. He will interrupt a scene to say something like,

> The arbitrary nature of our passion for children, who reveal so little of themselves during their short stay with us, is, for many, life's great romance. But, unlike the object of our romantic love, we do not choose the child who will be our son or daughter.

The novel is marred by such truisms—they feel inessential, grafted on, and it's easy enough to dismiss them and hurry on to the juicy bits. Still, there seems to be lurking in this potboiler a novelist of big ideas and real emotions and literary ambition. Maybe.

Eighteen years and five novels later, Hart demands to be taken seriously. *The Truth About Love* abandons plot almost altogether and invests itself almost entirely in its characters and themes. It opens with a stream-of-consciousness monologue derived from Joyce and Faulkner. A teenage boy in a small Irish town in the early 1960s has just had a terrible accident and lies shocked and paralyzed in the backyard garden of his family's house. His thoughts are associative—often hinging on language itself—and his sensations synesthetic:

> Doctor coming? Good. Because pain is somewhere and it's coming for me. It's a little wriggly-saw pain. Pain-saw. Noisy. And big-noise pain further down the pain-shaft is coming for me. I can hear it. Fly me away from the pain which is sawing me, pain—sawing louder and louder. And I'm going into some place of nothing at all only pain.

He is taken to the hospital and dies that night, and here the novel begins to trace the effects of his death in his family and town. The perspective undergoes abrupt shifts. First, the narration is taken up by a German immigrant who observes the events of the subsequent summer with an almost anthropological detachment, and a severity that can grate. The chapters narrated by the German (he is called "the German" by most people in the town) seem designed primarily to announce certain themes: Irish nationalism, national memory, guilt. He is connected to the boy, but by a thin thread: The boy admired his gate, romantically associating it with mythic and mythologized Irish heroism. The boy's father, in an overlong scene, asks the German if he can buy the gate as a memorial to his son. The German says he will consider it.

The next narrator is the boy's mother, Sissy, and though her voice is allotted only two chapters (to the German's seven), it is the most powerful. Unable to recover from the death of her son, she has been committed to a hospital where she reflects on the life she has temporarily given up. A tender and moving portrait of her marriage and family life comes through:

> I was always quiet with the hidden thing within me. The knowledge that no woman on earth was more loved than me. That I could guide and protect my children and keep my house and live love all the time. Live love. Just that. What woman would let anyone in on such a secret?

This romantic success is thrown into relief against a backdrop of less happy relationships among Sissy's neighbors. A rich world emerges, illuminated by Sissy's charged feelings and memories, and if the narrative still feels capricious and without true direction at this point, it has at least picked up a considerable head of steam.

Then, however, it shoots through the stratosphere, and for the final third of a pretty slim novel we float far above the world we have just begun to know so intimately. This final section is narrated by the boy's sister, Olivia, who takes us through the 45 or so years that have passed since her brother's death. Her tone is elegiac, and page after page reads like postscript:

> And so years went by for me and for my mother and for my father. Years, for me, of parts and parties, public and private, years of phone calls from them and letters and love floating back and forth between and down the lines, and visits of course, and all that strange surprise that adult life is when one is grown up, as they say, and way beyond grown up, talking to and looking at the man and woman who made you and. . . .

Et cetera. Her brother's story is all but abandoned so that larger issues might be explored. Historical speeches and scholarly lectures are quoted from at length. Connections are posited between love of country and romantic love; and personal memory and national memory; and Irish guilt and German guilt. But their interest is academic at best. One chapter takes us on a tour of the violent milestones of Northern Ireland's Troubles; another outlines a book the German has written, a sort of anti-heroic history of Irish nationalism. Olivia does encounter the German on a couple of occasions long after the death of her brother, and little plot points are obliquely revealed (the gate, for example, twice changes hands), but these feel like dutiful concessions to a story that the novel, for some reason, wants badly to forget about.

Could this be, exactly, the point? "I knew our private stories of grief and suffering would, and should, never be told," the German says late in the novel. "We would have to bury them. We would have to bury each and every individual story within the horror story of our time in history."

Hart's novel enacts just such a burial. But in doing so it refutes, rather than corroborates, the German's thesis. If history is a series of horror stories—which is one way to look at it—their horror surely derives from the plights of individual human beings. As *The Truth About Love* drifts further and further from the characters that have anchored it for so long, its emotional impact shrinks and finally withers away in a kind of history not far removed from textbooks. We are left to conclude that it is precisely the private stories of grief and suffering—what novels have long done best—that need to be told if the horror of history is to be felt at all. ♦

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B&A

Why We Fight

The Islamist dimension to the war on terror.

BY DAVID AIKMAN

The controversy over whether a 13-story building, called Park51, should be erected within 600 hundred feet of Ground Zero might have deflected our attention from who our enemies really are. They are not people who just happen to be American or foreign Muslims but people who subscribe to a deadly combination of ideological and religious attitudes that we ought, by now, to be able to recognize as "Islamist." As Andrew McCarthy, the lead federal prosecutor in the case against the "blind sheikh" Omar Abdel Rahman (convicted in the 1993 attempt to destroy the World Trade Center) makes clear, Islamism is the belief system that "Islam is the complete, obligatory guide to human existence, governing all matters political, social, cultural, and religious, from cradle to grave (and, of course, beyond)." In other words, it's a totalitarian threat to American democracy.

Most American Muslims do not subscribe to Islamism and are successfully integrated into America's constitutional democracy, in which individual liberty, and especially freedom of conscience, are considered sacrosanct and are protected by law. Indeed, many Muslims immigrated here precisely because they did not want to continue living in Islamic societies where alternative belief systems were unlawful. They do not appear to be perplexed by our political and social system which permits private citizens to distribute religious tracts, some of which warn against the danger of perishing in hell if the doctrines of the tract distributor are not followed. Ordinary American Muslims are no different from ordinary Americans; they accept the reality of a cacophonous marketplace of competing religious ideas as—well, "normal."

Islamists, however, whether foreign or native-born, believe that the ultimate goal should be to establish a regime, here in the United States and everywhere else in the world, where the rule of law is not constitutional democracy but *sharia*, Islamic religious law. Under *sharia*, women are considered in legal terms half as valuable as men, and can be legally beaten by their husbands. Even more menacing, people who refuse to accept Islam as the sole legitimate religion, and convert to some other belief system, can be arrested and put to death. Many Islamists, including those members of al Qaeda who perpetrated the 9/11 attacks, also want to see the creation of a global Islamic caliphate which would enforce the implementation of *sharia* all over the world.

The Grand Jihad
How Islam and the Left Sabotage America
by Andrew McCarthy
Encounter, 464 pp., $27.95

Omar Abdel-Rahman, 1989

REUTERS / CORBIS

How do we know this? Two reasons. First, it's made clear in all of the writings by self-confessed Islamists: the Egyptian Sayyid Qutb, for example, who hardened in his hatred for American constitutional democracy while a visiting student in Colorado in 1949, and his fellow countryman and spiritual forebear Hassan al-Banna, who founded the Muslim Brotherhood in 1928. Second, at the trial in 2007 of the Holy Land Foundation, a front-group fundraiser for Hamas, documents seized by the FBI linked the conspirators directly to the Muslim Brotherhood. That organization, though founded and headquartered in Egypt, is in fact an international network of activists with global aspirations. The Muslim Brotherhood (in Arabic, *al-Ikhwan al-Muslimun*) made it clear in those documents that they had far-reaching ambitions for the United States:

> The Ikhwan must understand that their work in America is a kind of grand jihad, in eliminating and destroying the Western civilization from within and "sabotaging" its miserable house by their hands and the hands of the believers so that it is eliminated and God's religion is made victorious over all other religions.

Other documents reported that participants in discussions in 1991 thought they were engaged in a "civilizational jihad."

The word "terror" hadn't even been mentioned by anyone at that point; indeed, it is hard to avoid the conclusion that the phrase "war on terror," freely employed by George W. Bush, was as unhelpful in enabling us to recognize our real enemies as it would have been for Winston Churchill to have proclaimed that the British were fighting a war on Blitzkrieg. Of course, Churchill had no difficulty acknowledging that he and his fellow Britons were fighting the Nazis, for whom bombing English cit-

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ies was merely one among many tools deployed in the war against British constitutional democracy. The difficulty for Americans today is that we are sensitized to the need not to offend other religions and have difficulty recognizing that some religions, including Islam, can form the basis of a political ideology aimed at destroying our liberties.

A better American understanding of Islamism is not made easier by the refusal of the Obama White House to use terms like "jihad" or "Islamic" when describing people who engage in, well, terrorist activities that just happen to have been planned by Islamists. As *The Grand Jihad* makes clear, the Army investigation of Major Nidal Malik Hasan, who gunned down 13 fellow Americans at Fort Hood last November, refused to acknowledge that he had been in contact with known advocates of Islamic terrorism against the United States, or that Islam had any role whatsoever in his motivation to commit murder. McCarthy pins down the meaning of jihad nicely as "not violence for its own sake. It is to pave the way for the imposition of *sharia*."

While making a coherent case for the enemy of our constitutional rights as being Islamism and its acolytes, McCarthy seems on less sure ground linking Islamic objectives to those of the left. True, "neocommunists" (one of whom he thinks is Barack Obama) subscribe to a hatred of capitalism, of individual liberty and of constitutional freedoms. It is true also that the left and Islam both subscribe to a utopian belief that their ideologies would lead to a perfect, or near-perfect, society. But much of what the left usually supports these days—gay marriage, for example, and generic feminism—falls within the domain of behaviors that Islamists would punish, sometimes with the death penalty. McCarthy is correct in asserting that "visions [of neocommunists and Islamists] coalesce: They are totalitarian, collectivist, and antithetical to the core conceit of American constitutional democracy, individual liberty." Despite overlapping disdain for American freedoms, however, "neocommunists" don't really subscribe to anything that Islamists would embrace.

How many Islamists are there in the world? No one knows for sure, but there are probably more than we should be comfortable with. A 2007 opinion poll conducted by the University of Maryland found that nearly two-thirds of Muslims polled worldwide favor strict application of Islamic law in every Islamic country. About the same percentage said they would like to see all Muslim countries assembled under a single global caliphate.

Is this a worrying figure? Well, it means that the developing global civilization that has been led by the West for two centuries seems ambivalent about whether it wants to embrace all the human and constitutional rights for which brave dissenters and brilliant statesmen struggled to hammer together our nation. And those rights, by osmosis, imitation, or mere cousinly sympathy, have since spread to much of the world.

To much of the world, that is, but clearly not to enough of it. ♦

B&A

One Dancer's Vision

Faye Driscoll blends mind and body in performance art.

BY NATALIE AXTON

All day, every day, from the middle of March through the end of May, performance artist Marina Abramovic sat at the Museum of Modern Art in her performance piece, *The Artist is Present*. This appearance was Abramovic's contribution to the eponymous MoMA retrospective running in the gallery space four flights above. Clothed in a full-length gown, her brown hair braided to one side, she sat in a wooden straight-back chair in a demarcated performance space within the museum's Marron Atrium and allowed museum-goers, one at a time, to sit opposite her for as long as they chose. One sitter, philosopher, art critic, and contributor to the exhibition catalogue, Arthur Danto, described his participation. After taking his place and contacting her with a shy wave, artist and audience-participant reached a kind of communion, which he described in the *New York Times*:

> At this point, something striking took place. Marina leaned her head back at a slight angle, and to one side. She fixed her eyes on me without—so it seemed—any longer seeing me. It was as if she had entered another state. I was outside her gaze. Her face took on the translucence of fine porcelain. She was luminous without being incandescent. She had gone into what she had often spoken of as a "performance mode." For me at least, it was a shamanic trance—her ability to enter such a state is one her gifts as a performer. It is what enables her to go through the physical ordeals of some of her famous performances. I felt indeed as if this was the essence of performance in her case, often with the added element of physical danger.

The 63-year-old Abramovic emerged from Eastern Europe's art scene in the early 1970s, one of many "ordeal art" performance artists who became famous for taking ideas of the body as performance subject and art object (or vice versa) to an extreme. In *Rhythm 10*, Abramovic spread her hand palm-down on the floor and rapidly jabbed a knife between (and occasionally into) her fingers. In the followup *Rhythm 0* she stood passively in a gallery surrounded by objects, including a loaded gun, a rose, a bunch of grapes, and a knife and invited onlookers to do whatever they wanted to her. "I use my body for an experiment," she told one audience in 1974 before taking pills that sent her into convulsions.

This time, despite one participant's attempt to vomit on her, Abramovic was hardly in danger. On the contrary, the

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MoMA under director Glenn Lowry is moving in the direction of "interactive" exhibits—Yoko Ono's *Voice Piece for Soprano* was in the atrium this past July—as part of a broader curatorial effort to create a repertory of the performance art movement of the 1970s and '80s. Many of Abramovic's former colleagues do not agree with this attempt at re-creation: Their performances were meant to happen once, and once only. But art goes on. What began in New York as a playful (and naïve) art-for-art's-sake movement has become, thanks in part to political controversy, canon. With this show, a new biography, and an appearance at the Whitney, Abramovic is the movement's reigning queen.

The "danger" Abramovic has sought for her creative work is this state of emotional exhaustion and physical pain: It might yield personal fulfillment, but it does not create theater. Sitting all day in the MoMA—no food, no potty breaks—was, no doubt, exhausting; but there is remarkably little artistry in *The Artist is Present*. It's pure manipulation in a room full of people watching one person watch an art star. This is the kind of work for which the German term *ein Stück* is apt: a kind of secular David Blaine magic act, an artful semi-retirement. And yet, regardless of its fatuousness, performance art can be enjoyed as live action, as metaphysical riddle: Was it Abramovic's physical suffering that made this performance art and not celebrity worship? Is the suffering an act? Is the audience complicit?

These are the kinds of questions that keep university art and theater departments in business. And the university is the place where the young avant-garde is reared. If, as Danto has written, the end (or the limit) of art is philosophy, the limit of dance is history. Art is concept; dance is action. And at the beginning of the 21st century we see dances about dances about dances. This exaggerated determination can have the ironic effect of removing the dance movement from the dance. As dance has become more experimental, performance art has moved into more formalized settings. The two disciplines have created an uncomfortable overlap, and it's hard to know who's doing what—especially from the funding, presenting, and reviewing perspectives.

'There is so much mad in me'

The dance artist Faye Driscoll is one inheritor of this messy legacy. A graduate of New York University's Tisch School of the Arts, and one of Dance magazine's "25 to Watch" in 2008, Driscoll has been quietly building a reputation as a serious artist. Her latest full length show, *There is so much mad in me*, appeared last spring at Dance Theater Workshop, New York's premiere contemporary dance venue. DTW presented *There is so much mad in me* in a return engagement late last month, and with that show, Driscoll proved her creative voice is reaching maturity, and that she might be the only dance artist attuned to contemporary anxieties of intimacy, and the ironies of a society that "overshares." Driscoll's work explores the limits of empathy in our post-9/11, digitized world through a lens of hyper-emotional physicality. Oscillating between verbal and non-verbal communication, her dancers are always on the edge, insecure, needy, overconfident.

This, in performance-speak, is a post-evolutionary vision; but the world (and it is a world) of *There is so much mad in me* is Darwinist from the start. Nine dancers in colorful street clothes enter the empty, white performance space following an overture of birdsong designed by sound engineer Brandon Wolcott. Biologists think birdsong, like human speech, is an arrangement of consonants and vowels; dance is an arrangement of step sequences. When the overture ends, the dancers have formed a circle around dancer Nikki Zialcita. They're looking at her, and she's staring down the audience. She hunches and growls at two men, one of whom is cradling the other and pulling an imaginary hook through his cheek.

This encounter sets the tone for the 75-minute work, the movement of which will strike a ballet or traditional modern dance audience as undisciplined. But again, dance is action. The action in *There is so much mad in me* is a development of Driscoll's previous work, particularly her autobiographical 837 Venice Blvd. This show is decidedly darker. In its opening duet Zialcita, one of New York's most compelling performers, wiggles, giggles, and shimmies towards the audience while Michael Helland holds her arms behind her back. It's hard to know whether he is hurting her, or trying to hurt her, as the duet becomes more intense. But she seems to enjoy it and laughs giddily. When he starts swinging her upside down, and she tries to keep her skirt from falling down, Helland remains impassive while controlling her. Zialcita body-slams him, NFL-style, to get a reaction; but that doesn't work. She slaps her body, first at Helland, then for its own sake. The rest of the group, attracted by the commotion,

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comes onstage to watch. They cheer her on with real enthusiasm and, when she stops, congratulate her with a box of chocolates and bouquet of flowers.

If this sounds like reality television, that's because it is. To create this work Driscoll gave the performers images which they, in turn, used to conjure emotions. It's a process of "researching through the body," in the words of dancer Jacob Slominski, to generate movement. Images drive the work, but they are as fluid and graphic as their meanings are personal: A prisoner turns into a dog into a burlesque performer, a fight turns into a church social into a rave. The group starts in a motionless circle but finishes in a marching phalanx.

These microshifts are made possible by Driscoll's strong direction and structural design. Trios, duos, a false ending, singing, blackouts, and kitsch each has its proper place. Driscoll also samples television. When Adaku Utah, clad in red denim and a Mohawk hairdo, steps onto a riser, her fist raised overhead, she's a Black Power figure and demagogue of materialism. Riffing on talk show hosts, she declares that no one in the audience is taking this seriously enough—and we've all won new cars! (The fourth wall is breached expertly by lighting designer Amanda K. Ringger.) The dancers, who have become an audience, rush the stage, screaming. Later they re-create a famous/notorious episode of the Tyra Banks talk show ("Five Women, Ten Vaginas") with a gay twist, ending in a brawl.

This is important: If dance is becoming history, it is manifestly a history of sex. The sensibility that aggression is the most authentic representation of life, love, and art pervades the dance and performance community. From *So You Think You Can Dance* to elite ballet companies, scenes of domestic violence have replaced the traditional, romantic *pas de deux*. These duets all vary on the direction to "run together, embrace, punch, run away, repeat." For this we can thank Twyla Tharp, whose duet "That's Life" in her seminal *Sinatra Suite* (1984), which updated the *danse apache* for the American concert audience, was created for Mikhail Baryshnikov and Elaine Kudo. This power struggle was one piece of Tharp's statement, and unfortunately it has become an end in itself.

The ballet world is so mired in this misery that many choreographers are turning to traditional narrative ballets to escape it. Several of New York City Ballet's premieres last spring were throwbacks: Christopher Wheeldon's *Estancia*, a fairy tale on a ranch; Melissa Barak's *Call Me Ben*, a bio-ballet of the founding of Las Vegas; Alexei Ratmansky's *Namouna: A Grand Divertissement*, an abstraction on the theme of classical ballet. George Balanchine insisted that a man and a woman onstage made a story. Today we need man, woman, horses, skyscrapers, goofy costumes, sailors, and bathing caps.

Perhaps the renaissance of performance art corresponds to our anxieties in the age of terrorism. What in Marina Abramovic's time was defined as a crisis of the body is now a crisis of community, and many are capitalizing on this rage of rage. But Faye Driscoll questions the audience's complicity in the culture of voyeurism and doesn't deliver on it. She is the most promising performing artist of her generation. ♦

B&A

Chic and Cheeky

The spirit of Swinging London lives in Fashion Week.

BY SAMANTHA SAULT

London

On my first night of Fashion Week, I was told to leave a bar because I'm a woman. I was staying at the Cavalry and Guards Club, a members-only establishment that, in 1890, was the premier club for officers in elite regiments of the British Army. Frequented by the prince of Wales (later the duke of Windsor) in the 1920s and '30s, it is now open to men and women and provides affordable accommodations on Piccadilly, just steps away from Buckingham Palace, Hyde Park, and the venues for Fashion Week.

Apparently, the club still retains remnants of its customs from its earlier days when it was considered unladylike to drink cocktails during the day with male officers.

I popped into Geoffrey's Bar for a cocktail and a bite to eat prior to an evening of catwalk shows and champagne-filled parties. With the exception of a portrait of the queen in the entryway, the walls of the Cavalry and Guards Club are covered in artwork depicting Englishmen in uniform and British military victories. But upon entering Geoffrey's, my male companion was informed by the bartender, "I'm sorry, no ladies are permitted in the bar until 6 P.M."

Welcome to London? Well, that scene in the Cavalry and Guards would contrast sharply with the spectacle at London Fashion Week, one of the most *non*-traditional fashion weeks in the world. From the cutting-edge catwalk fashions to attendees' avant-garde, often bizarre, clothing ensembles and hairdos, London Fashion Week would seem awfully foreign to the officers of the club's heyday.

At an evening screening of short films in London's edgy Shoreditch neighborhood, British *Vogue*'s art director Jaime Perlman told me that Fashion Week is a "creative hub" featuring "new, emerging, young talent" from Britain and around the world. "Some of the most innovative designs start here," she added. In addition to her duties for *Vogue*, Perlman runs Test, a digital experimental company and website that allows her a "creative outlet to work with more up-and-coming designers." Test produces, among other things, fashion films, many

Samantha Sault is a writer in Washington.

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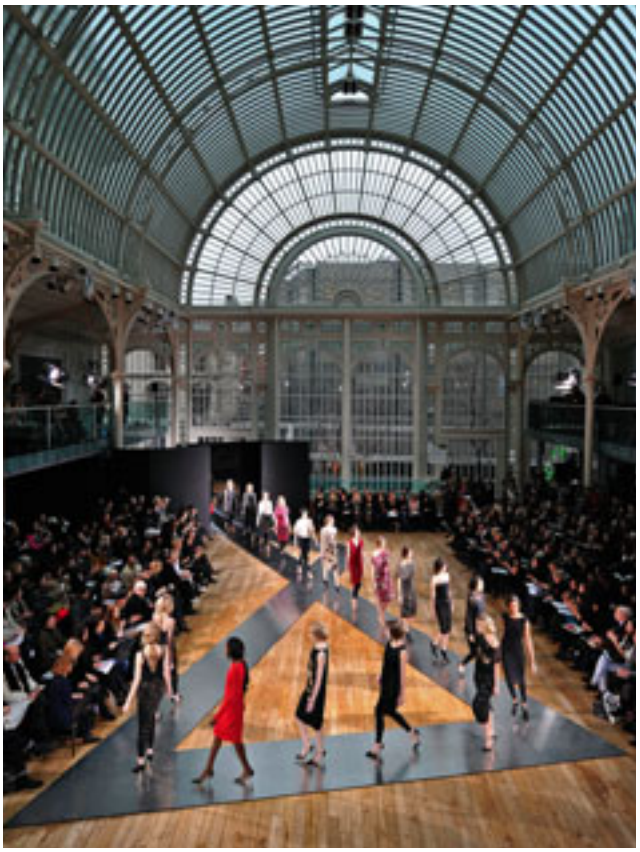
of them with dark storylines to highlight the collections. One showed the Spring/Summer 2011 collection of designer Cecilia Mary Robson, who studied at the London College of Fashion. In the film, translucent young models play tennis and frolic in an eerie, Gatsby-style mansion while wearing Robson's modern shift dresses. (At the end, all the models are shot on the tennis court by an unseen gunman.)

Over champagne at a pop-up shop in a Mayfair gallery, the French couturier Alexis Mabille explained London Fashion Week by saying it mixes "tradition plus a fresh attitude." In addition to his eponymous couture, Mabille designs sequin- and fur-adorned down coats and vests for Pyrenex, a family-owned down company that began in the feather business in 1859. In an attempt to appeal to a broader audience, Pyrenex brought its flashy, fashion-forward designs to Fashion Week in London, with its rich history and young designers.

That mix of the traditional and "fresh attitude" can be seen throughout Fashion Week, from the location of the catwalk shows to the catwalks themselves. London Fashion Week is headquartered at Somerset House, the massive neoclassical building overlooking the Thames at the edge of fashionable Covent Garden. The Palace of Westminster and Big Ben can be seen from the entrance. The site is rich with history, dating back to the 12th century when it served as a prime residential area for families looking to gain influence at court. In the 1550s Edward Seymour, the Duke of Somerset, built a mansion on the site where, a century later, Oliver Cromwell's body lay in state. Although it survived the Great Fire of 1666, the original Tudor palace was demolished in 1775 and rebuilt to become London's center of the arts. The Somerset House courtyard contains the main London Fashion Week tent, housing the British Fashion Council's catwalk-show space and press lounges. The winding, palatial rooms were filled with the freshest ready-to-wear, jewelry, handbags, accessories, and lingerie. Visitors lounging and smoking in the courtyard ranged from the most stylish Britons in the latest fall fashions to people with bizarro costumes and furs, visible lingerie, colorful hairdos, and giant shoes.

The catwalk fashions, too, mix the traditional and modern. The British designer Jasper Conran, son of Sir Terence Conran, sent airy sundresses and pants fit for a country holiday down the catwalk. The clothes were quite demure, but the tangerine and lime designs were fresh. Meanwhile, the Welsh designer (and former Alexander McQueen intern) Jayne Pierson showed blouses with sleeves and necklines reminiscent of the Tudor era, mixed with sleek gray leather jackets and dresses featuring military details. Other clear trends on the catwalks and in the presentation halls of London included neon colors, sheer fabrics and lingerie details, and baubles with spikes and skulls.



Catwalk at Covent Garden

The fresh attitude is sometimes cheeky: The Israeli-born designer Lee Klabin created my favorite collection with its stunning sculptured dresses with corset bodices, sheer blouses, and sassy shorts. I chatted with Charlotte Bishop, Klabin's PR woman, in the designer's showroom in a Shoreditch loft space. She told me about Klabin's beginnings as a bespoke corset designer for celebrities like burlesque dancer and model Dita Von Teese and actress Sarah Jessica Parker. Klabin's latest ready-to-wear collection features slimming German jersey dresses, sculptured Napa leather skirts, raw-edge details that are "rough and ready," and, of course, "sensuous, lingerie-inspired details" that create Victorian silhouettes for the modern woman. Sold exclusively at Harrods, the collection, I was informed, is designed for the woman who is "a strong business woman one day, and a fun party girl the next."

Such a woman, I thought, in her sexy, stunning leather corset-bodice dress, might cause a stir at the Cavalry and Guards Club; but she would epitomize the style and attitude of London Fashion Week. It's gaining prominence among the fashion weeks of the world, and to echo Jaime Perlman, it's a hub of creative new designs and a venue for designers who either aren't sufficiently well known for Paris or commercial enough for New York. London is the breeding ground for cutting-edge fashion now, but most designers would like to build their brand beyond the city. After all, as Bishop told me excitedly, her boss is also showing her Spring/Summer 2011 collection at a pop-up shop during Paris Fashion Week.

London, however, remains a birthplace for fashion trends. When I asked Alexis Mabille why they brought Pyrenex to London, rather than some other destination, he replied: "London is the beginning." ♦

AFP PHOTO / CARL DE SOUZA

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B&A

Movie Star/Actor

Tony Curtis, 1925-2010. **BY JOHN PODHORETZ**

Tony Curtis, who died last week at the age of 85, had one of the strangest careers in Hollywood history. He was, for years, an extremely pretty boy with not much discernible talent. And then, all of a sudden and for only two years, Curtis became a genuinely great film actor. And then, just as fast as it had blossomed, Curtis's extraordinary talent seemed to desiccate.

Curtis spent much of the 1950s as a laughingstock of a kind, an exemplar of Hollywood's propensity for ludicrous casting. Whether he was in a swashbuckler set in medieval England or a desert-sands flick, Curtis could not mask the thick New York Jewish accent he never lost, and his anachronistic line readings instantly became a source of campy jest. (He never actually spoke the words "Yonda lies da castle of my fodda," but he came close.) If he can be said to resemble any current Hollywood star, it would be Taylor Lautner, who plays the werewolf boy in the *Twilight* movies. Lautner now commands about $10 million per picture and has been on the covers of hundreds of magazines; he has a fascinating face and an absurdly ripped body and cannot credibly speak a sentence.

The first glimmer that Curtis might have something more to offer came in 1953, four years after he had begun in Hollywood, when he starred as Harry Houdini. It must have seemed an amusing idea to have Bernie Schwartz from the Bronx play Ehrich Weisz from Milwaukee—two Jewish kids who transformed themselves into stars through sheer force of will. The movie isn't very good, but you can see something happening in Curtis's body, how he unstiffens himself for the first time.

John Podhoretz, editor of Commentary, *is* THE WEEKLY STANDARD*'s movie critic.*

The physicality he displayed in *Houdini* served him in good stead three years later when he costarred with Burt Lancaster in *Trapeze*, a movie notable now only for the fact that the two men were introduced to each other on it. Lancaster's production company was planning to make *Sweet Smell of Success*, a movie about an evil gossip columnist and an amoral press agent, and Curtis somehow convinced Lancaster to give him the latter part.

Every Hollywood lightweight who proves himself a box-office draw gets

'Sweet Smell of Success' (1957)

EVERETT COLLECTION

a chance or two or three to stretch in a part no one would think him capable of. These experiments are all too often risible—think of Patrick Swayze, fresh off *Ghost*, playing a tormented doctor in Calcutta in *City of Joy*, or Zac Efron from *High School Musical* trying to embody a young actor tussling with greatness in *Me and Orson Welles*. Very infrequently, magic happens. Nick Nolte had success in the mid-1970s as a scuba-diving treasure hunter in *The Deep* when he took on the part of a grizzled Vietnam vet drug dealer in *Who'll Stop the Rain* and was so dazzling he instantly became known as one of Hollywood's best actors.

Curtis's turn in *Sweet Smell of Success* is the Platonic ideal of this gimmick—the greatest turnaround moment for an actor in movie history. His performance as Sidney Falco is not only amazing because Curtis is the one delivering it; it's a performance any actor at any time would have been proud to claim. Curtis not only had to embody a tricky, dishonest, motor-mouthed louse, but a small-souled and cowardly weasel besides. There is nothing remotely grand or elevated about Falco's villainy; he is the cinema's foremost EveryHeel.

Two years later, after having continued in a dark vein playing a racist Southerner chained to Sidney Poitier in the vivid prison-escape drama *The Defiant Ones*, Curtis suddenly emerged again, this time as a brilliant farceur in Billy Wilder's *Some Like It Hot.* Curtis is spectacular in it, blowing his costars Marilyn Monroe and Jack Lemmon off the screen. Later that year, having parodied Cary Grant to perfection in *Some Like It Hot*, Curtis costarred with Grant in the hit submarine comedy *Operation Petticoat*, playing an egotistical scrounger in a part that combined Sidney Falco's do-anything ethos with his *Some Like It Hot* lightness of spirit.

So, Tony Curtis, 1957 to 1959: three major hits (*Some Like It Hot*, *The Defiant Ones*, *Operation Petticoat*), one Oscar nomination for Best Actor (*The Defiant Ones*), and the financially unsuccessful but critically celebrated *Sweet Smell of Success*.

And then, a series of lame and overproduced sex farces and slapstick epics just drained the integrity from his work. All that was left was frantic, exhausting, pointless energy. By the 1980s he was playing supporting roles in horror movies. There would be no late-in-life renaissance for him, though over time the singular brilliance of his work in *Sweet Smell of Success* would come to be universally acknowledged.

Most actors never deliver even one immortal performance, to say nothing of two. But the consideration of a career like Tony Curtis's is an occasion for sadness, for who knows what could have been if he had just been a wiser steward of his own talents. ♦

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